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THE MARY JANE PAPERS

BY A. G. PLYMPTON

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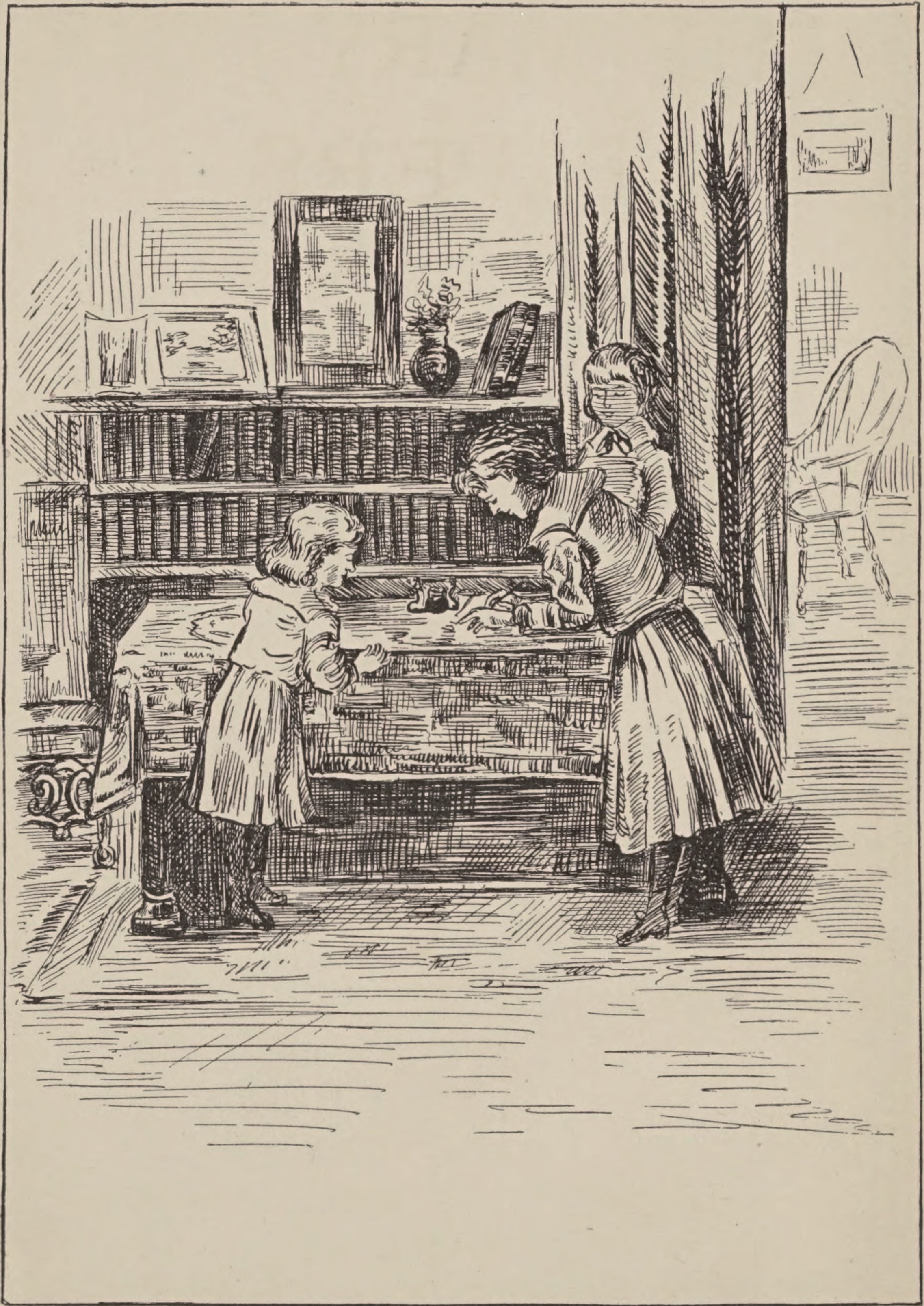
THE MARY JANE PAPERS



"SO I FOUND A PEN AND PUT IT DOWN FOR HER."—*Page 97.*

THE MARY JANE PAPERS

By

A. G. PLYMPTON

Author of "Dear Daughter Dorothy," "Little Sister of Wilifred,"
"Two Dogs and a Donkey," etc.

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE

A PREFACE is a great bore, but I suppose every book ought to have one. I have looked at a great many to see just how to write it, and I find they usually begin something in this style: "In offering these memoirs to the American Public, I feel deeply my own incompetence, etc., etc." But mercy! I think I am a great deal more competent to write my own autobiography than any one else. For an autobiography, you know, is a story that the heroine writes herself. From those I have read, I should say that the heroines of autobiographies are even superior to other heroines.

This is *my* autobiography and I am Mary Jane.

Besides the preface, there is another bore, and that 's the title. The trouble about that is, it has to fit the book. It seems that anything that is especially appropriate has been used by somebody else, so that I have settled at last on plain Mary Jane Papers.

My Uncle John said I ought to have a poetical quotation, too, on the title-page, and suggested some lines which I have used, although there does n't seem to be much sense to them. But then, you know, you don't expect much sense in poetry.

Some of these chapters have already been published in St. Nicholas, but as that is only a child's magazine, and a great many people, therefore, have missed seeing them, I have gathered them all together, and with a number of other chapters presented them to the "American Public" in this little book.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE
I. KITTY'S MOTHER 1
II. HOW I TOOK THE PRIZE 12
III. A TERM AT THE TUCKERTOWN SCHOOL . . . 23
IV. THE SPICERS' COWS 34
V. MRS. POLLY ANN BUNCE'S BEST CAP 42
VI. BEING ARTISTIC 53
VII. A VISIT TO MARY JANE — FROM THE PEN OF BETH HALL 65
VIII. SALLY 84
IX. MRS. MELANCTHON BENNER 92
X. MY COME OUT PARTY 105

ILLUSTRATIONS

"So I found a pen and put it down for her" . . *Frontispiece* ✓

"'Can't play any more now; it's school time'" . . . . *Facing page* 3 ✓

"All the poorest and dowdiest girls were in it" . . . . " 14 ✓

"I could just see 'Tildy's hand with the bell in it" . . . . " 28 ✓

"'How d'ye do, Mary Jane?' said she. 'How d'ye do, Miss Spicer,' said I" . " 36 ✓

"Beth confessed that the mantel-shelf looked very artistic" . . . . " 58 ✓

"Mercy! How we did sing! twice as loud as the grown-up choir" . . . . . " 71 ✓

"We stayed in a long time and played we were sirens" . . . . " 98 ✓

THE MARY JANE PAPERS

MARY JANE PAPERS

CHAPTER I

KITTY'S MOTHER

I WONDER if any one thinks how tiresome it is to be a little girl, and how perfectly horrid a girl's mother can be, if she chooses. No; that 's the worst about grown people, they never seem to suspect that there is anything out of the way about them. They are saints in white, of course. All but Kitty's mother! She is perfectly splendid.

I don't know Kitty's mother very well, but they live in a splendiferous big house next to ours, and I often hear what goes on at the other side of the fence.

My mother makes me wait on her all day long. It 's " Mary Jane, just put on your hat and run down to Bennet's and see why they don't send the coal " ; or, " Mary Jane, step 'round to Hazelton's, and tell them to send me a peck of potatoes." Very nice, to be sure. Why don't she " just run round to

Bennet's or step into Hazelton's" herself, if it's such a trifle?

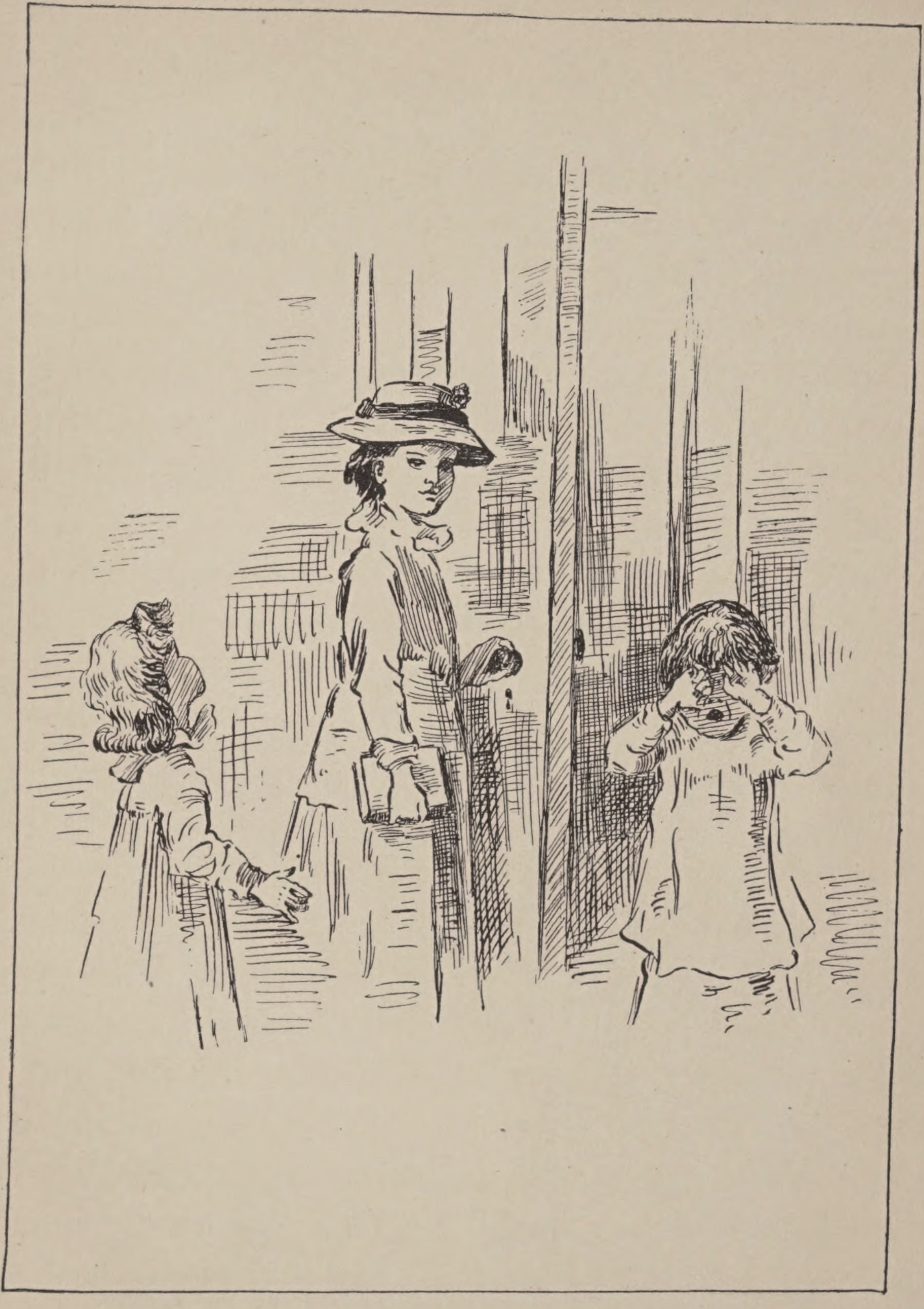
Kitty's mother says: "Don't wear yourself out carrying that heavy parasol. Let Eliza hold it over your head, love." I heard her as they were walking in the garden.

Imagine my mother thinking that I could wear myself out. No, not though I ran errands and tended baby, and ran up and down stairs all day long.

And oh, once I was in the toy-shop, and Kitty and her mother came in, and her mother did actually say, "Don't you see anything here that you would like, Kitty dear?" and "Kitty dear," like a little simpleton, said, "No, mamma."

I wish my mother would let me call her "mamma," it sounds so stylish, and makes you feel just like a girl in a book; but she says "mother" is the most beautiful name in the world. I'm sure, I don't think so.

People say that I'm not a good little girl, and I think it's because I'm not brought up judiciously. It spoils a child's disposition to be constantly thwarted, and that's why I do a great many things that are bad. That's why I tear my clothes so often, and make up faces behind people's backs.



"CAN'T PLAY ANY MORE NOW; IT'S SCHOOL TIME."—*Page 3.*

I 'm aggravated. If my mother was not so strict about my going to school, I think I should be a much better girl. I 'll tell you how I have to manage when I don't want to go. I get the twins, and begin the most interesting play that ever was. Just as we get all ready to have the party, or get into the cars for a journey, or something exciting, I stop short and say: "I can't play any more now; it 's school time." Then Lucy sets up the most awful howl, and as she has been sick, it is n't good for her to cry, so if mother 's pretty busy, and can't 'tend to her, she says: "Perhaps you had better stay at home to-day, Mary Jane. Lucy is so fretful, and will have to be amused." And then I get them into the yard, and run away and have a good time by myself. I know it is n't right, but I 'm aggravated to it.

But what I particularly like about Kitty's mother is that she is so interested in everything you do, and is so encouraging. Now there is that composition I wrote, and mother snubbed so. At least, she said I had better try something more simple, and would n't let me give it in. It begins: "It was a beautiful spring morning, and all nature seemed to blend with one accord into each other." Well, I always thought it was real good, and when I read it to

Kitty's mother she said she thought it was beautiful, and that I would turn out a famous authoress.

All this I wrote one day in my journal. It is dated a year ago, so now I can tell you what happened afterward when I had a chance to compare Kitty's mother with my own.

One day, Kitty's mother came to see mine. I supposed that she had come to make a call, and I thought that was splendid, 'cause I believed that she might influence her to bring me up as she did Kitty. But, oh, she had an object in coming that I never should have dreamt of. She wanted to adopt me for a companion for Kitty. I was in the room when she told my mother so, and my heart bounced, I can tell you.

I thought mother looked amused at first, and she put her hand under my chin to hold my face up to hers, and said: "Do you want to leave your mother, dear?" I really believe she thought I would n't want to go.

When I said, "Oh, mother, do let me," a great blush came over her face. "I will think it over," she said, quietly, to Kitty's mother, "and I 'll let you know my decision."

She had a long talk with father when he came home. I don't think he approved of my going, but after the twins were in bed and baby asleep, she came into my room, and told me that she had concluded to let me try it for a month, while she and the children paid a visit to grandpa.

I could hardly believe my senses, for I never supposed she would let me go, and I was wild with delight. Kitty's mother is a perfect love, I declared, and mother kissed me gently and left me.

In just a week, I began to be Kitty's mother's little girl. My trunk was carried over to the big house, and I kissed my mother — my first mother, you know — and the twins, and carried the baby to the carriage that was to take them to the station, and after seeing it drive away, I followed Kitty to my splendid new home.

I had never been in the house before. When I had seen Kitty and her mother, it had always been in the garden or the little summer house. That is where I read my compositions to them, and learned to think Kitty's mother perfection. But now I entered the tiled hall, and walked through the elegant rooms on either side of it. It just turned my head to think of living there.

"Now we'll go upstairs, and you shall see the room that has been prepared for you," said my mamma.

"Yes, mamma, said Mary Jane, tossing back her golden curls as she glode down the marble hall."

This I said out loud, but I intended to say only "yes, mamma," — the rest came out before I knew it. You see, I was pretending I was in a book.

Kitty's mother laughed outright. "You are the most amusing child," said she; "but I should think being called Mary Jane would take the poetry out of anything." "It does," said I eagerly, "I want to be called May Jennie instead." So May Jennie I became. In two or three days, I almost forgot that I had ever been called Mary Jane at all. My new mother was just elegant, I thought, and there were no errands and no baby.

I did n't know just what to make of Kitty, — she was n't a bit like me, or any girl I knew. When I played with her it always reminded me of the day I was shut up in the spare chamber, and made believe that my image in the glass was another little girl and tried to play with it; she would do just what I did, but she would never do anything first. She did n't care to play much, anyway. Her mother said that she was too delicate, and I felt that I ought to be too delicate, too. At first, it was great fun to pretend to be too feeble to move, and call a servant every time I wanted anything; but I got very tired of that sort of thing, by and by. One day, I said to Kitty's mother, —

"I should like to go and splash round in a mud-puddle, as I used to do when I was Mary Jane Hunt."

I thought she would never let me, on account of my fine clothes, but she said, "I am afraid you can't find a mud-puddle, there has been so little rain lately; but you can tell Thomas to take the hose and make one for you."

I could not help laughing at this plan. I should feel pretty cheap to do that. I think I 'll get a book and read, instead.

"There," said she, "that just proves my theory. You never would have cared to do such things, if your mother had not been so strict. The fact is, she does n't know how to bring up children. Why, my dear, how warm you look!"

I suppose I did look warm. I felt mad. Why should she go and talk in that way about my mother? To be sure, I had complained about her myself when I was Mary Jane Hunt, and grumbled because she made me run errands, and amuse the baby, and pick up threads off the carpet, but —

About this time, I began to think it was very queer I had received no letters from mother. It 's true I had not asked her to write to me, because I had n't thought anything about it then. I longed to hear what they were doing at grandpa's. So one day I sat down and wrote, —

Dear Mother: Why don't you write to me? I want to know if the twins cry as much as usual, and if the baby is as cross now that his tooth is through. I 'm having a splendid time.

Then this I scratched out and wrote instead:

This is a very handsome house indeed. Does grandpa let the children ride old Whitey, and does Aunt Prue make many doughnuts? I can eat just as much cake as I want to, here; but they don't have any doughnuts. I don't see why. Do write soon to your own,

Mary Jane.

When the answer came, it was a real short one. Mother said the children had all gone huckleberrying (oh, don't I like to go huckleberrying!), and she never wrote a word about seeing me again. I thought she would say when she was coming home, and how glad she would be to see me when the month was over. Could it be that she expected me to live with Kitty's mother always? I sat right down and cried at the thought of it.

I made my eyes so red, that Kitty's mother declared that I should receive no more letters.

"It just upsets you," said she, "and besides, when a person adopts a child, she does n't expect the relatives to meddle with it."

Meddle! I began to think I hated Kitty's mother.

I told the truth when I wrote that I could have all the cake I wanted, for Kitty and I used to have lots of it. I don't believe it agreed with me, for before that month was over I became real ill. Now I knew why Kitty did n't care to play, and preferred to loll all day on the lounge. I could n't hold my head up, and I felt as cross as a bear. Oh, how I did snap at people if they spoke to me!

Of course, I would not take any of the medicines prescribed for me, for I never do until my mother makes me. And Kitty's mother only laughed when I flung them away. She did n't seem to try to do anything to make me more comfortable, but left me entirely in Eliza's hands. I began to feel the value of the mother I had left. All day long I cried for her, till that hateful Eliza said, "Lor', miss, I would n't be crying for her, she is n't half so illigant as your new ma."

Oh, dear, I did feel so mad and so sick, I could n't think of anything half horrid enough to say to her. I could only lie there and cry.

I suppose I must have been pretty sick. I know I felt horrid. How I wished I was healthy Mary Jane Hunt again, with the baby and the errands, and the strict mother thrown in.

"She is a hundred million times better than Kitty's mother, after all," I sobbed to the pillow.

When the doctor came, and inquired for Miss May Jennie, I screamed out that my name was Mary Jane Hunt, and I suppose he must have thought I was raving.

But Eliza explained that that was my real name, and May Jennie only my new name I had taken, and all about my coming there to live.

He was n't the regular family doctor, for he had gone out of town; but I thought this one must be just as good, and better, too, when he took my hand and said: "Oh, ho! so that 's the trouble, is it? Well, Miss Mary Jane, we must get you back to your own mother. That 's the kind of medicine you need." And so a telegram was despatched that very night to Mrs. Deborah Hunt, and the next morning I was lying in her dear, kind arms.

I had to take my medicines regularly after that, and I got well, but I think the reason was because I had got back to my own mother again, and the doctor thinks so, too.

And now, if any one wants to make me real mad, they have only to call me May Jennie, or ask me if I don't wish my mother was like Kitty's mother.

CHAPTER II

HOW I TOOK THE PRIZE

FOLKS say that Dot is the beauty of our family. To be sure, Lucy is her twin and looks like her, of course; but the measles, and the mumps, and the whooping-cough have stolen her red cheeks and left her as thin as a wafer. Anyhow, she has the best disposition of any of us, and I suppose that counts for something. As for Baby, he has the worst disposition, and the strongest lungs, and is the greatest nuisance every way. "But Mary Jane," my mother says, "is the smartest child I ever had."

I am Mary Jane.

Perhaps you think it is vain of me to tell this at all. But I am writing my autobiography, you know, and must tell the truth, or it won't be authentic. My father says, "If it is not authentic, a work of this sort has little value." So, you see, I am obliged to say that I am smart.

As I must be authentic, I shall begin by saying that, although I am so smart, I am not at all handsome. When they had the tableaux at our church, they never asked me to be in them, though Dot was stuck up in 'most every one. The idea of going to a show and having to look at Dot, whom I see every blessed day at home for nothing! Besides, when we have our pictures taken in a group, they always turn me sort of side face. I s'pose they don't think I see through that. Well, beauty is only skin deep, as Mamie Whyte said in her composition; so I don't care.

At our Sunday-school, there were to be two prizes given at the end of the year. The first prize was to be a Bible, and the second a prayer-book! and the two scholars who should learn the greatest number of verses in the Bible would get them. I never thought of such a thing as getting a prize. I had a Bible and a prayer-book, and I did n't want another, anyhow. Ours was the most stylish class in school. We were the most stylish girls and had the most stylish teacher. We had the minister's daughter for our teacher.

Well, she said one day, —

"It 's too bad none of you girls will try for the prize. I really should like to have one of you get it."

Milly Briggs said that some one in the minister's daughter's class ought to get it, but none of us wanted to try. There was Mabel Pratt, but she was going to New York for a visit, so she would n't have time; and Jenny Gurney was so slow to learn, and Mamie Whyte and I did n't want the trouble.

Miss Parks had about the meanest class in the Sunday-school. All the poorest and dowdiest girls were in it; and Miss Parks herself wore a waterproof, and was so queer looking. Jo Holland was in it, for one; and I always hated her. No, I don't hate her, of course, for that would be wicked. I mean I hate the evil that 's in her, and that 's a great deal.

One day, coming out of school, Jo whispered to me: " How many verses have you learned? "

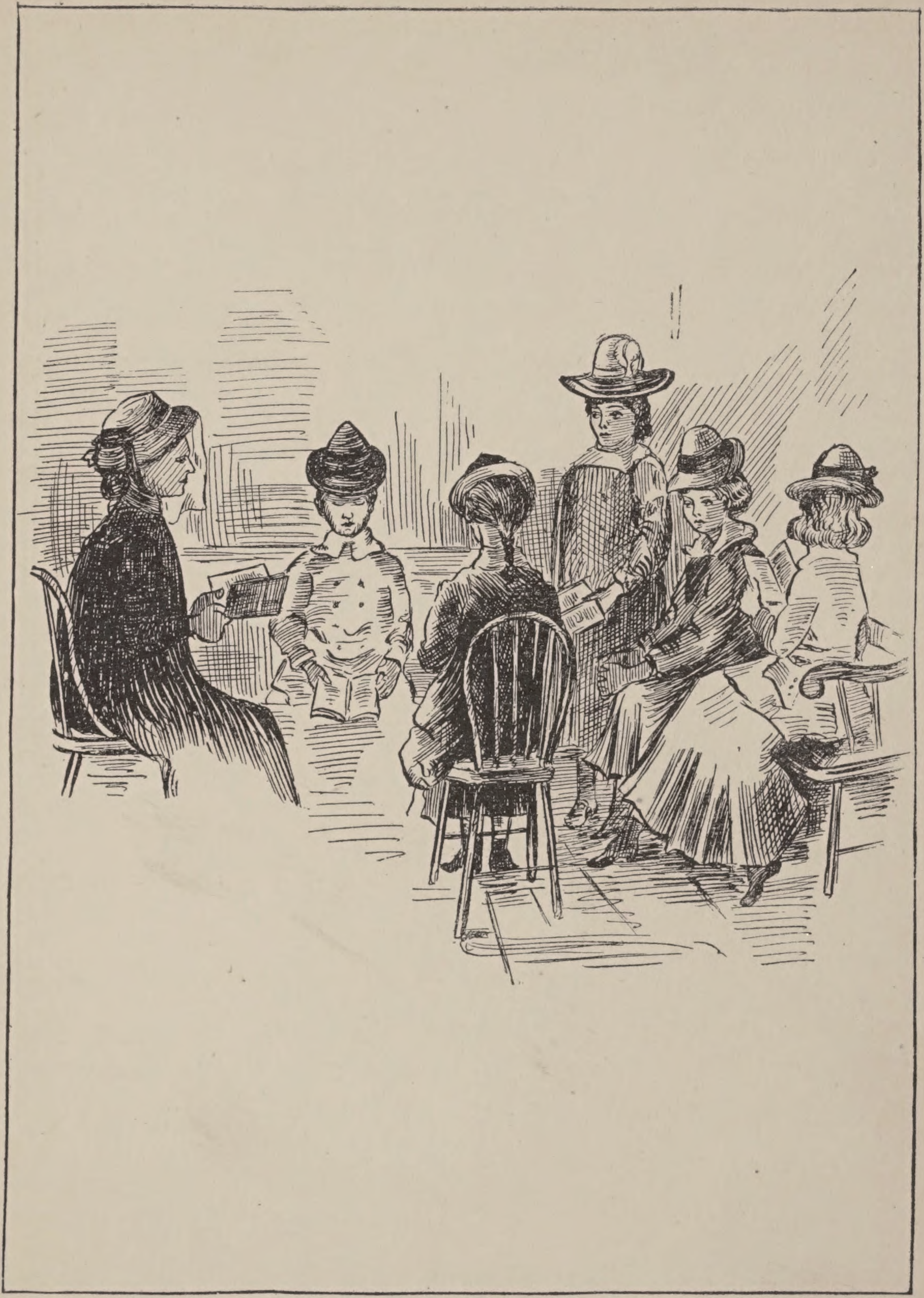
" Not more than twenty," said I.

" Pooh," said Julia Brown, one of Miss Parks's girls, " no one in that class will ever get it."

" I do believe," declared Mamie Whyte to me, " that Jo Holland thinks *she* is going to get the prize."

" Well, she just sha'n't then," said I. " I can learn just as many verses as she can, if I have a mind to; and I declare I will, just to spite her."

I made up my mind not to let Jo know that I was trying for the prize, thinking she would learn



"ALL THE POOREST AND DOWDIEST GIRLS WERE IN IT."
—*Page 14.*

more verses for fear of being beaten; and then, too, it would be such fun to surprise her at the very last moment. I did n't even tell them at home, for fear they would let out the secret. I selected all the short verses, and left out the big ones between; and that next Sunday when Miss Newell, our teacher, asked me how many verses I had learned, I said, "Fifty."

"Dear me! I can't hear you say so many to-day," said she, looking pleased.

Well, I did n't have time to say more than five or six, but she gave me credit for fifty. And so with my other twenty, I had seventy in all.

It was nearly Christmastime, and I was so busy getting my presents ready, that I did not have much time to study.

For mother I was making a lovely pincushion. I began it for Aunt Jane; but that was two years ago, and I knew she had forgotten all about it. I told Mamie Whyte that I was going to give it to her, and she said it was lovely, and thanked me for it; but that was before I dropped it in the coal-hod, and I did n't believe she would want it after that. With mother it 's different, because she says she values anything her children have taken pains to make for her.

I meant to get something real handsome for father, but I had only fifty cents to buy it with. Dot and I used to go shopping every day after school, and that was fun. We always went into the handsomest stores. I went into an elegant one once, and I told Dot that I knew we could find something to suit us; but everything was so dear. The clerk was very polite, too, and we looked, and looked, and looked; by and by I found the loveliest little stand for cigars, and I knew father would like it. It did n't look very expensive, either, but the gentleman said it was five dollars and fifty cents.

I asked him if he would n't take off the five dollars and let us have it for fifty cents.

He said he would take off fifty cents and let us have it for five dollars, but that would not do.

Dot told him to send us a postal card if he had anything before Christmas in his store for fifty cents. And then we went home. On the way we spent the fifty cents for pickled limes, and treated all the girls; so I could n't give father any present, after all.

I was going to make Dot's doll a dress. Mother said that she would cut it out, and I could make it. After a while I told her that I would rather she should make it, and let me cut it out; but it was already cut out by that time, and, finally, I got mother to make it for me too.

When it came to Lucy's present, I was tired of sewing, and mother suggested that I should give Lucy my calla; but it had two buds on it, and I concluded to wait until summer, and give it to her on her birthday.

So you see I had lots to do; but I squeezed out time to learn a great many verses. One day, when father came home, I heard him say, —

"Mother, where is Mary Jane?" And Dot answered:

"She is up in her room, reading the Bible."

It sounded beautifully. That next Sunday I had fifty verses more; and the next forty; and then fifty again, and so on.

Well, by and by, Jo Holland found out how many verses I had learned, and gave up trying for the first prize, and bent all her energies on the second prize.

I was real mad with whoever told.

I went right to Mamie Whyte and told her, and said, —

"Now, you must get that second prize."

"I can't; it 's so late now," replied she.

But I told her how easy it was, if she only picked out the short verses, and so many that Miss Newell could n't hear them.

Mamie did n't like Jo any better than I did.

"I will try," said she; "but it 's lucky we are not in Miss Parks's class."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh! 'cause she makes 'em recite every single verse. I know, 'cause I used to be in it. You could n't have beaten Jo Holland, if you had been in her class, could you, Mary Jane?"

Sometimes Mamie Whyte can say as disagreeable things as anybody I know; but I never take any notice of her mean speeches, and that 's the way we get on.

At last Christmas came.

I did n't like my presents very well. One was a book — a history. I have n't read it yet. Mother gave me a new dress; but I should have had to have it anyway, and I don't like clothes for presents. The worst was a horrid work-basket, with lots of needles and thread in it. Aunt Jane sent me that, and I was real glad I had n't given her anything. She said in her letter, that perhaps I should like to sew better if I had a nice little work-basket of my own. I wanted a locket.

Dot and Lucy had lovely things; but mother says I am getting too old for toys. In the toe of my stocking I found a five-dollar gold piece, but I was n't allowed to spend it, so I did n't care for it. I consoled myself by thinking what fun it would be to see Jo Holland's rage when Mamie and I got the prizes.

We were going to have our festival in the church, right after the evening service, and of course all the people would be there. Each class had a motto and an emblem. Our motto was "By their fruits ye shall know them," and the emblem was lovely — a silver salver, with a stick all wound around with ribbons, standing in the centre of it, and heaped around with oranges. It was the most beautiful thing! The motto for Miss Parks's class was "No cross, no crown," and the emblem was n't half so pretty as ours — nothing but an old evergreen cross.

The church was as full as it could be. Mother could n't come, for she had to stay at home with Lucy, who was sick. But all the other mothers were there, and lots of people besides. When each class was mentioned, the scholars in it all stood up, and the one that held the emblem caried it to the altar. The minister held it up so the people could see it, and explained the motto, and then it was taken back again; Mabel Pratt carried our emblem. I suppose she was chosen because she has blonde hair, and wears such handsome clothes; but she is a clumsy thing, and tipped it up, so that some of the oranges rolled out on the floor, just opposite Miss Parks's class, too.

After all the emblems had been carried up, the prizes were given out.

"The first prize," said Mr. Newell (that 's our minister) "is awarded to Miss Mary Jane Hunt, who has learned thirteen hundred and fifty-two verses in the Bible during the past year."

At the words, "thirteen hundred and fifty-two verses," everybody turned and looked at me; and as I stood up, a chorus of "O–o–o–o–o–o–oh's" went 'way round the church. I should have liked to stand there all day, but Miss Newell pulled me down.

After I had received my prize, and taken my seat, the second one was given to Miss Mamie Whyte for nine hundred and thirty verses. Everybody stared again and the "oh's" went round, but not near so many as for mine. I tried to look at Jo; but she was sitting in front of us, and I could n't get a glimpse of her face. I think it was real hard to miss seeing her after I had worked so.

Well, after Mamie came back with her prize, I supposed it was all over; but what was my surprise when Mr. Newell popped up again to say that they had originally intended giving but two prizes, but a third was now to be awarded, as a mark of approbation, "to Miss Josephine Holland, who had learned five verses regularly every week, without a single exception, during the entire year."

And up pranced Jo, as proud as a peacock!

Just then, Mamie grabbed my arm and whispered that somebody said that we were all to be called up to repeat our verses, —

Mercy! How frightened I was! My heart came right up into my mouth. It did! and my knees shook so that I could n't have walked up to that altar again to save my life.

Of course it would frighten anybody to have to recite thirteen hundred and fifty-two verses before a whole church full of people! but it turned out to be only a silly joke of Mamie's, by which she meant to scare me.

After the congregation had been dismissed, I saw the third prize; and what do you think it was? A real lovely locket!

Anyway I heard lots of people say that it was a queer prize to give at a Sunday-school, and I 'm sure I should n't want to wear jewelry for having learned verses in the Bible. Beside, mother said if I would break myself of my habit of interrupting, she would give me a locket! So it all came out right, after all.

It came out right, but, in spite of the glory of getting the prize, somehow it left a bad taste in my mouth, and I just hated to think of it. Every now and then my father would say that he was going to hear me repeat those verses; and whenever he looked at me, I thought my time had come. Everybody that I saw had something to say about the festival, and how smart I had been, and the children called me "Miss Thirteen-hundred-and-fifty-two."

But whenever the subject was mentioned at home, mother looked at me in — well, such a suspicious sort of way, that I wished a hundred times it had never come into my head to try for the prize at all. I gave my Bible to Dot.

On the fly-leaf was written, —

"Miss Mary Jane Hunt,
from her affectionate pastor,
Sunday-school festival."

and the date; and Dot has written underneath, —

"She gave it to me."

CHAPTER III

A TERM AT THE TUCKERTOWN SCHOOL

TO be sure 'Tildy was an uncommon scholar for Tuckertown, but everybody said she was too young to teach school. "A gal o' that age," said Deacon Fisher, "can't be expected to hev much discipline, and I wonder the committee should hev elected her."

It was the summer after the one in which I had been adopted by Kitty's mother and following the winter I had taken the prize at Sunday-school, and I had become older and wiser since those foolish days.

I had broken myself of all my bad habits. I never interrupted people any more, and never answered back. I was reformed. That spring, Lucy had come down with the scarlet fever, and Dot and I were sent to grandpa's to escape the contagion, and that is how I came to go to school to 'Tildy Joy.

Before I had been in Tuckertown five minutes, in came Beth Hall. We had always been bosom friends; but I remembered how she used to mock grandpa's limp, and Aunt Jane's cough, and the way Deacon Fisher sang through his nose, and I wondered if I ought to go with her now that I had reformed. While I was making up my mind, she bounced up to me, saying, —

"You dear, elegant Mary Jane. I 'm so glad you 've come;" and she kissed me, and I had to kiss her, of course, and after that there was no use holding back. I thought at first I 'd try and reform her too; but she is so full of fun, and such a harum-scarum thing, that I concluded that it would n't be any use to try.

The minute Aunt Jane went out of the room, Beth told me that 'Tildy Joy was going to teach the district school.

"Just think of our having to mind her," she said scornfully, "and only last year she was nothing but a scholar herself, and played tag 'long of us, recesses."

"Well," said I, "I sha'n't mind a word she says, and you must n't either, Dot."

"Land, I pity the schoolma'am that has you for a scholar!" said Betsy, who had come up to unstrap our trunk. She did n't know that I had reformed, you see. "You are a perfect imp and always were."

I don't care. I think it 's real mean of Aunt Jane to send us to school when we come visiting her. 'T is n't polite, any how.

I remember 'Tildy perfectly. She was a real green-looking girl, and wore the biggest sunbonnet in Tuckertown; and that 's saying a great deal. The Joys were poor, and they lived in a curious old black house, with a roof which sunk right in in the middle, and folks said it would tumble in, some time, on their heads. Aunt Jane said that she had heard that 'Tildy meant to fix the old house up, now that she had a salary.

It seemed queer enough, I can tell you, to see 'Tildy in the teacher's seat that next morning, when Beth and Dot and I went into school. She had her dress made long, and braided her hair behind; and as she sat at the desk, she looked as stiff as a stick. I could see she was trying to be very dignified, but I remembered how she used to tease for my apple-cores, and I was n't going to be respectful.

" How d' ye do, 'Tildy? " says I. " Going barefoot this year? "

Everybody giggled except 'Tildy, and she looked bouncing mad.

" Take your place, Mary Jane," said she. " The seat next to Beth Hall."

Did you ever hear of such a goose? The idea of putting Beth and me together. After I had had all the trouble of reforming, too; for I knew the minute I slipped into my seat, that I never could keep that up, with Beth giggling at my side. You see she had a bad influence over me. She just set me on. She would have made a saint in white cut up capers, I do believe. I wonder why it was that no one saw how she set me on? But they did n't; they thought poor innocent me was at the bottom of everything; and her mother even told Aunt Jane that Beth thought she must do just as I did, because I lived in the city. Now I am sure it was she that started all the mischief. It was she who proposed putting the toads in 'Tildy's lunch-basket, and it was she who wrote that letter. I believe I told her what to say, but then that 's nothing. We had lots of fun about the letter. You see we pretended it was sent by the committee, and we addressed it to Miss 'Tildy Joy, and said that her salary was going to be raised, and signed it Deacon Green. He is one of the committee, you know. We watched her through the keyhole when she read it, and I remember how happy she looked all the morning, and how we giggled because she was so much more amiable than usual.

It was a real queer school. It was n't one of the strict kind at all.

There is no kind of a trick that we did not play on 'Tildy, at least I never heard of one. I never saw such a school before; but it was n't my fault.

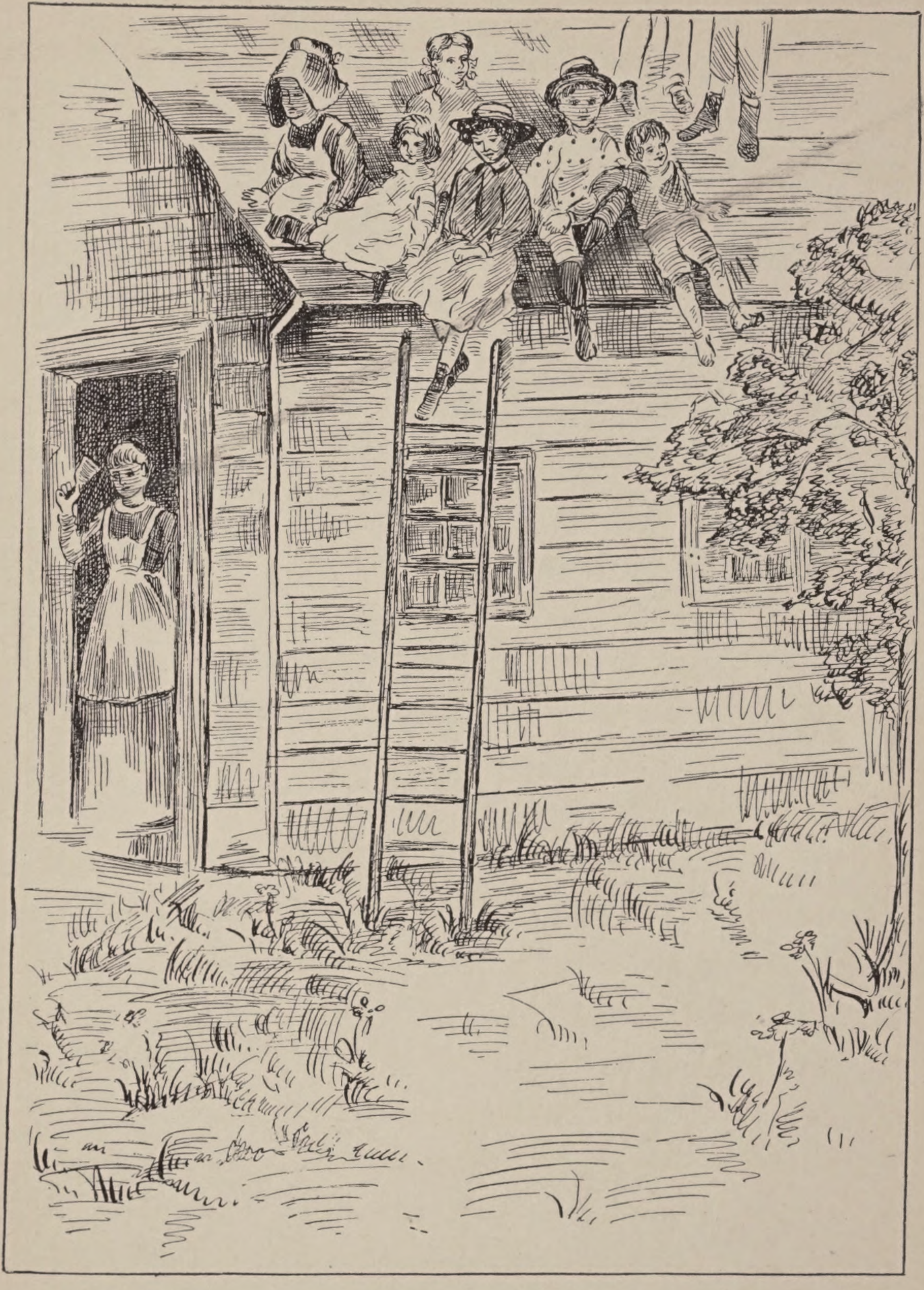
But the worst thing of all happened one day towards the end of the term. We had been expecting the committee all the morning, and had been on our best behavior. I don't know how it came about, but they had all got an inkling of how things went at school. Perhaps the mothers found out and told them. I know they did n't want 'Tildy to teach next term, and they all seemed to think that she had n't any discipline; I don't suppose she had. Jane Fairbanks, who lives in the next house to 'Tildy, said, once she had seen Deacon Green go in there and thought, from the tone of his voice, that he was complaining about something. At any rate, she began to look pale and worried. Aunt Jane said she hoped I was not troubling 'Tildy with my shines. Shines, indeed! It was all very well to feel kindly to *her,* but what was the use of hurting *my* feelings, I 'd like to know? I was so mad, or rather grieved, that I made up a face at her every time she turned her back.

Well, the committee did n't come, and it was recess time.

"I 'll tell you what," said Beth, "let 's climb upon the roof and let 'Tildy hunt for us" (I hope you notice that it was Beth and not I who said this).

"Let 's," said I, and we all made a rush for the shed. We had got up on the roof before, and I knew that it was easy enough to boost each other up from the top of the shed. There we sat, waiting for the bell to ring. Pretty soon it did ring; I heard the door open, and by holding on to the edge of the roof and leaning over, I could just see 'Tildy's hand with the bell in it. Then she went in, and we waited. In a few minutes she rang it again, furiously. We were all giggling by this time, and if I had n't held on to Dot she would have rolled off the roof. Then it sounded from out of the side windows, and then from a back window, and then at the door again, and then 'Tildy called and called, and finally she stepped out, and, still ringing the bell, walked towards the woods. I shall never forget her look when she turned round and saw us.

Oh, my! But was n't she mad? She stood at the foot of the shed and called us to come down, in a voice that fairly shook with rage. I don't know why, but we insisted that we were not coming down,



"I COULD JUST SEE 'TILDY'S' HAND WITH THE BELL IN IT."

—*Page 28.*

that we were going to say our lessons up there, and she could bring a chair out and sit down and hear them. While we were still there, and 'Tildy stood entreating us, we heard the sound of a wagon, and the first we knew that old committee had come. As we hopped down, one by one from the roof, they stood talking with 'Tildy and watching us. Beth said she thought she heard the words, "too young," and "no discipline." I know I heard 'Tildy sigh as I passed her to go into the schoolhouse, and her eyes were full of tears. We tried to do our best in the examination, but it was plain that 'Tildy had lost her hope and courage. I wondered, as I walked home, if she would lose her position, too, and that night I dreamt that the old Joy house had tumbled down, and folks said that it was my fault.

There was going to be a huckleberry party that next day, and we all begged in vain to stay away from school and go. I did n't feel near so bad about 'Tildy as I had in the night. I have noticed that I do most of my repenting, and make most of my good resolutions, in the night: and I think it 's a real good plan, 'cause it leaves the days all clear to do what you please in.

"I think it 's real mean," said Beth; "my mother never wants me to have any fun. Oh, if school only would n't keep, if only the schoolhouse had blown down, or 'Tildy was sick."

"Oh, I wish she were," said I, "I hope she ate lots of plum-pudding and mince pie just before going to bed last night."

"And currants and milk," suggested Dot.

"And lobster," said Beth.

Just then Jane Fairfield came running towards us.

"No school. 'Tildy 's sick," said she, and flew past us like a flash.

We all looked at one another, and Dot began to cry.

"I did n't mean it at all," said I. "I — I only just said so."

Beth actually looked pale. "Our saying so did n't make her sick," said she. Then she burst out: "Mary Jane, you 've behaved awfully the whole term, and I don't think you are a good girl for me to go with."

That was a pretty idea, was n't it? I just got mad with Beth Hall. "It was your fault more 'n mine," said I. "I had reformed, and you are a — "

But Beth was gone.

"I would n't mind," said Dot. "Her conscience is a-pricking her."

"I hope it is," said I, fiercely; "and yours, too, miss;" and I turned from the road and fled into the woods. I don't know where Dot went.

'Way down behind the schoolhouse was a cave, where we often played house, Beth and I. I went there because I would be sure of seeing no one. There I sat all the forenoon, and thought of all the tricks we had played on 'Tildy, and called myself and poor little Dot and Beth all the hard names I could think of. I know I must have felt real sorry, for I made up my mind to go and tell 'Tildy so, and promise to be a better girl in the future.

As I came out by 'Tildy's house, what was my surprise to find Beth sitting on the old stone wall by the road.

"Well, if I ever," said I. "What did you come here for?"

"I'm going to see 'Tildy," explained Beth. "My conscience has been pricking me till I feel like a pincushion, and I'm just going to tell 'Tildy how sorry I am, and that I shall behave like an angel when she comes back."

"Well," said I, "that's what I came for. Let's go together, for, you know, folks say we always set each other on. Now, Beth, you begin and set me on pretty quick, 'cause Aunt Jane will be as cross as a bear if I don't get home in time for dinner."

"But you must set me on too," said Beth.

"I 'm trying, but you don't go," I answered.

Beth sniffed. "It 's all bosh about my setting you on, Mary Jane. You don't budge an inch. I 'll bet I could *push* you along a lot faster," and before I knew what she was about, I was right in front of the door. I meant to knock and then slip round the corner, leaving Beth to face the music; but the door opened suddenly, and Mrs. Joy, 'Tildy's mother, stood upon the threshold.

"What do you want?" said she, in, oh, *such* a tone of voice. "You 've about killed my 'Tildy with your capers, and now I won't have you hanging round the house. If you don't clear out this minute, I 'll set the dog on to you."

We ran every step of the way home.

"Oh, my," gasped Beth, "was n't she awful?"

That afternoon we went huckleberrying.

The summer passed, and there was no school, but 'Tildy was getting better slowly before I left Tuckertown. I went up to bid her good-by the day of the county fair, when Beth said her mother would be sure to be out, and I told her how sorry I was for everything I had done to annoy her.

'Tildy said that her uncle had invited her to spend the winter in New York, and she was going to wait till she was a little older before she tried to teach school again.

I add a letter which I received about a month after I got home. It was from Beth, and read:

DEAR MARY JANE: You know I promised to write you what the new teacher was like. Well, she is a DRAGON.

The Committee was determined to have no more such doings as we had while 'Tildy was here, and they put an advertisement in the paper for the crossest woman in America. Guess you would think they had found her, if you were here now. She begins the morning exercises by whipping all the big boys. I don't mind that so much as some other things, though. She has got plenty of discipline. We don't climb on the roof, recesses, any more. We don't put toads in *her* lunch basket. I don't like her. I don't think she is a very good teacher for she don't explain things clear. I don't think we get on as well as we did when we had 'Tildy. I told Deacon Green so. He laughed. All the mothers like her.

Your affectionate friend, ELIZABETH HALL.

P. S. — I don't know for certain that they advertised for Miss Clarke, but everything else is just as I have said. Honest injun.

CHAPTER IV

THE SPICERS' COWS

THEY had lots of cows, the Spicers had, — and they passed most of their time in our garden. The reason they did n't stay in the pasture was because the fences were all broken down; for the Spicers were the most shiftless folks in Tuckertown. Why I cared about the cows, was because I had to drive 'em out.

It was the summer that Lucy was sick, and Dot and I were sent to grandpa's.

Well, one day, grandpa said, —

"If those cows get into my corn again, I 'll drive 'em up to the pound."

"What 's the pound?" asked Dot.

"It 's a pen," said grandpa, "where you can drive any cattle you find on your land; and the owner can't get them out without paying a fine."

"Oh, I think that 's elegant!" said I. "I know lots of people's cows I should like to get into the pound."

When grandpa went out, I said I would go and tell Sarah Spicer just what he had said.

"Now, Mary Jane, you just stay where you are. You want your fingers in everybody's pies." It was Aunt Jane — you might know — who said that.

I might have answered that she was so sparing with hers (especially mince) that I never could touch *them*. But I did n't. I often think of real smart things, and it 's mean that I can't say them.

But, I declare, there is never any use at all in my arguing with Aunt Jane; for, when I get the best of her, she always stiffens up and says: "There, that will do, Mary Jane! Not another word!"

Besides, it is n't right to answer back. So I just said nothing, but took Dot and marched straight off to the Spicers'.

We found Sarah and Sam playing in front of their house. Mercy me! I never saw such a gone-to-wreck-and-ruined place. Half the window-panes smashed, and the shingles coming off, and the wall broken down, and not so much as a path up to the front door! I suppose that is so that folks will go to the back door, as Aunt Jane did that day I went there with her and found the hens picking up the crumbs in the kitchen. I should have thought Mrs. Spicer would be ashamed of that, would n't you? But she was n't! She said the hens were company for her, and, besides, they "saved sweeping."

Aunt Jane says Sarah Spicer 's "not a pretty-behaved little girl," and I should n't think she was. So saucy! And she swings her skirts when she walks, and it 's real aggravating. Besides that, she makes up faces at real nice folks. Beth Hall and I turned round quick once and caught her at it.

I thought she was looking more saucy than ever on this particular day, and I determined to be very dignified and distant.

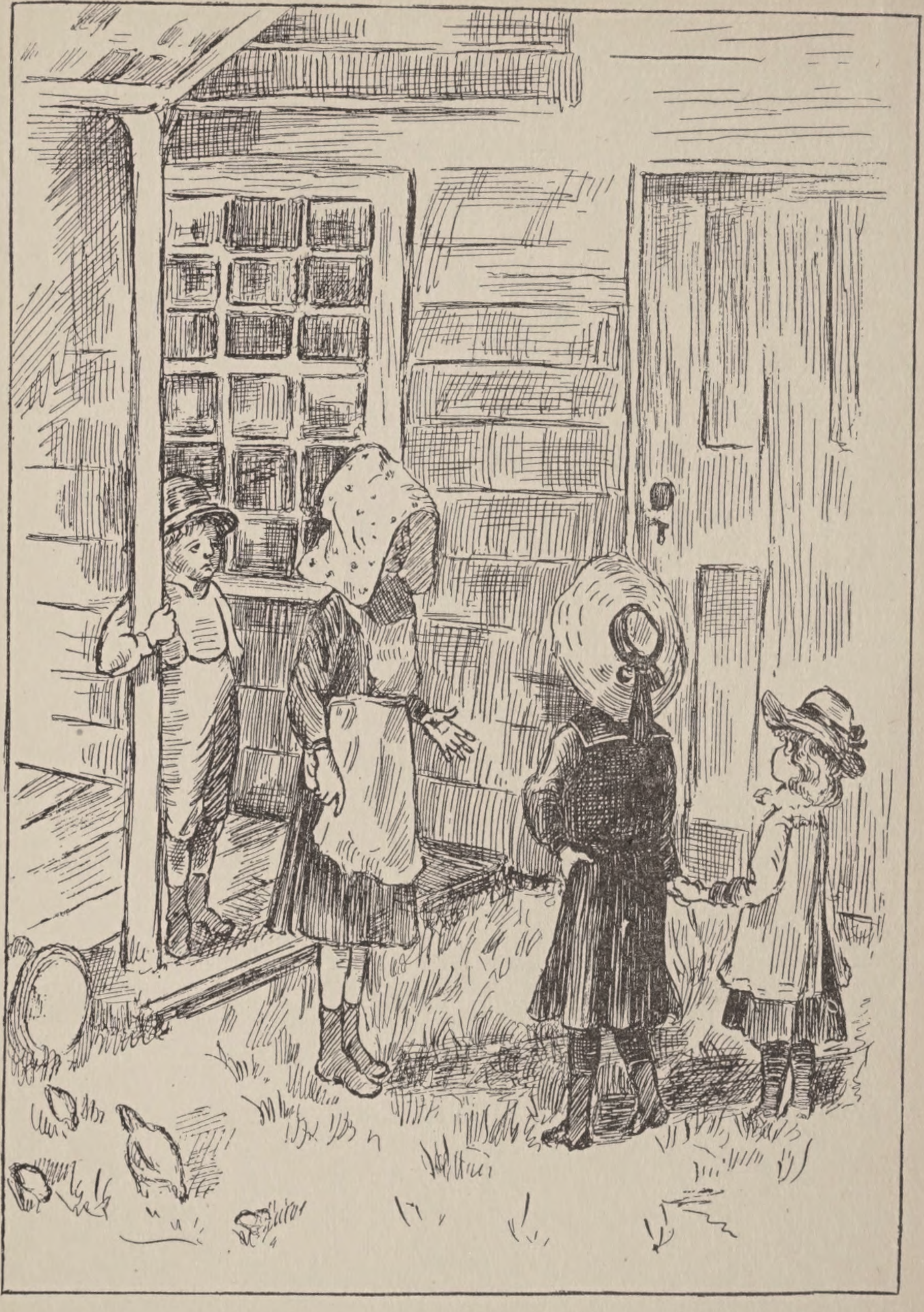
"How d' ye do, Mary Jane?" said she.

"How d' ye do, Miss Spicer?" said I.

"Mercy me, Mary Jane, what airs!" said she. "It 's no use to put 'em on here in Tuckertown, I can tell you, for folks know all about you."

"There, that will do," I said, as like Aunt Jane as ever I could. "I only came over here to tell you that we are going to have your cows put in the pound the very next time we find 'em in our garden."

"Poh!" cried out that Hop-o-my-thumb of a Sam. "Your grandfather has said so lots of times, but he never does."



"HOW D'YE DO, MARY JANE?" SAID SHE.
"HOW D'YE DO, MISS SPICER, SAID I."—*Page 36.*

"Does n't dare to!" snapped Sarah.

I was just boiling mad. The idea of my being treated so by those low Spicers!

"Dare to?" said I. "I wonder who you think would be afraid of such a poor, shiftless set as you are? My grandfather says your farm does n't raise anything but weeds and potato bugs. But I 'll tell him it raises plenty of 'sarce' besides."

And then I took Dot's hand, and just ran for home, so as not to give Sarah a chance to have the last word.

Oh, but don't I 'spise her!

Well, that afternoon Dot and I went into the barn to play. We played that we were angels, and made the loveliest crowns of burrs, and real nice wings out of newspapers. When we wanted to fly, we went to the top of the loft, and flew down to the hay on the barn floor; but we did n't care to fly much, it was so much nicer to bounce up and down on the clouds — I mean the hay — and play on our harps and sing.

We were just in the midst of it, and enjoying the fun with all our might, when Aunt Jane screamed out, —

"Mary Jane! Mary Jane! The cows are in the garden. Run and drive them out."

"Is n't that mean!" said I. "The idea of asking an angel to drive cows!"

"Play they are evil spirits," suggested Hiram, who was cleaning out the stalls.

"No, they 're not," said I. "They are just nothing but cows. Besides, it makes me hot to run after them, and angels ought never to be hot."

Then Aunt Jane began to scream at me again, and of course I had to go.

"It 's too bad!" cried Dot. "Those Spicers' cows spoil all our fun."

"I 'll tell you what," said I, after I had shoo'd them into the road, "I 'm going to drive 'em right up to the pound. I 'll show that Sarah Spicer —!"

"Why, Mary Jane Hunt!" cried silly Dot, "what 'll grandpa say? I won't go."

"Say? Why, that he is much obliged to me, to be sure. And if you don't come right along, I 'll take off my little crown and stick the prickles into you, miss!"

That 's what I said, but I knew I could n't get the crown out of my hair — the old burrs stuck so. I got some out, though, and tied my hat on, set my wings against the wall, and got a stick to drive the cows with. Dot trotted after me as meek as a lamb.

It was n't far to the pound; but there was one cow and her calf that would n't hurry, and, besides, we walked very slowly along the sunny parts of the road, and rested every time we came to a shady place; so it was late in the afternoon when we left the pound and turned to come home.

"Let 's go round by the Spicers'," said I; "I don't care if it is farther. Perhaps we shall see Sarah."

"I don't want to see Sarah," answered Dot. "I saw enough of her this morning. 'Sides Aunt Jane said if we got through supper in time she would take us to see Mrs. Green, and you know she is going to give us some pears."

But I was bound to go past the Spicers'; so I said: "We 'll hurry, and go 'cross lots, and I know we sha'n't be late," and I had my way.

We went quite a distance by the road, and then through Mr. Hall's cornfield and the woods beyond, and came out right in the Spicers' pasture. The sun had just gone down, and there was a bright light behind the row of old jagged apple trees along by the stone wall, which was so broken down in places that it was an easy matter for the cows to stray away. Dot and I noticed that there was only one left now in the pasture.

"I hope Sarah and Sam will have a good time hunting after the others; and good enough for 'em," said I. "Perhaps her father is just scolding her now for letting them stray away."

"Well, he is n't, for there he is now." Dot pointed, and I saw Sarah in the swing on the butternut tree in front of their house, and her father was swinging her up ever so high.

When she saw us she jumped out and ran to the fence.

"Hope you 'll find your cows to-night, Sarah," said I.

"You had better go for 'em," chimed in Dot.

"Hope you 'll find *yours,*" retorted Sarah. "If you don't keep 'em out of our garden we are going to drive 'em to the pound."

"Te, he," giggled Sam.

What could they mean? I wondered, as I hurried on, if our cows had got into their garden; and it worried me so that I told Dot.

"I don't believe it at all," said Dot. "They just wanted to scare us and get even with us."

Although we hurried so, it was late when we got home. We were afraid that supper would be all over, and Aunt Jane would scold us for being late. But though the table was set, and grandpa was home from work, no one had sat down to it.

"Been waiting for the milk," said Aunt Jane; "but it 's no use to wait any longer. I 'll use morning's milk."

"Yes," said grandpa, who was washing his hands at the sink. "Do let 's have supper. Children, have you seen the cows?"

"Why, no," I answered, "not ours; but Dot and I drove the Spicers' cows up to the pound."

"Those that were in our garden?" demanded Aunt Jane, looking straight at me.

I nodded.

"Well, of all the little mischief-makers! Those were *our* cows."

"My gracious, goodness me!" said I; "and grandpa 's got to pay a fine to get his own cows out of the pound? Oh, dear! I do hope Sarah Spicer won't find out about it."

Dot and I did n't go to Mrs. Green's for pears that night, I can tell you. Instead, we went to bed an hour earlier than usual; but Sarah Spicer does n't know anything about it; and after Aunt Jane went downstairs Dot and I had a real good time playing angel.

CHAPTER V

MRS. POLLY ANN BUNCE'S BEST CAP

MRS. POLLY ANN BUNCE is Beth Hall's grandmother, and she wanted to go to the convention at Providence.

"'T is n't likely, 'Liz'beth," she said to Beth's mother, "that I 'll ever live to see many more of these anniversaries, and as I am not so poorly as usual, this year, I think I 'd like to go."

"Well," said Mrs. Hall, "I have been counting on spending a day with Lucius's wife, and I might as well go now and take you to the convention."

"I want to go to the convention, too," cried Beth. "And anyhow, mother, if I don't go to the convention I should like to go to Providence."

Her mother looked doubtful for a moment, and then said, —

"Well, well, I 'll see about it. We shall not go till next week Thursday, so don't begin to tease now, child."

By Wednesday Mrs. Hall had decided to take Beth with her to Providence, and, as Dot and I needed new shoes, she offered to let us join the party.

There were quite a number of Tuckertown people going into town that day. Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce went in the early train; but, as there was not room for us in the carriage, Beth, Dot, and I were to follow in the next one, under the care of Mrs. Ithamar Tibbetts.

Mrs. Hall said that this was a very nice arrangement, but Beth and I did n't think so at all. We did n't like Mrs. Ithamar Tibbetts. Aunt Jane said that I had a prejudice against her, and that it was very wrong, because she is a good, conscientious woman. Well, I suppose she is; but anyway I could n't bear her. Beth and I consoled ourselves with the thought that when we got to the station we could run away from her and get a seat in another car. But she kept an eye on us every minute, and finally seated herself directly behind us.

"I don't care," I whispered to Beth. "In the big depot at Providence I know we can get away from her. We will hurry out of the cars ahead, and there will be so much noise we sha'n't hear her call after us. While we run out into the street she will have to stay and look after her baggage; that is, if you know the way, Beth."

"Oh, yes, I know the way," said Beth.

We did n't have any baggage except Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce's best cap, in a box, which Mrs. Hall had given us to carry for her.

Well, everything happened exactly as we had planned; and very soon Mrs. Tibbetts and we had parted company. "Now," said Beth, "let 's walk slowly and look into all the shop windows. I want to spend my money right off."

Beth had a dollar, and Dot and I each had fifty cents. Mrs. Hall had the money for our shoes.

I had made up my mind to buy a lovely fan with a shepherdess painted on it, when Dot suddenly cried: "Why, where is Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce's best cap?"

Sure enough, where was it?

"It has gone on to Boston in the train," said Beth, faintly. "We must have left it in the cars in our hurry to get away from Mrs. Tibbetts."

"Oh, how Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce *will* look without any cap!" giggled Dot.

"And how do you think *you* will look when we have to tell that we lost it?" snapped Beth.

Dot of course began to cry.

"'T was n't my fault, Beth Hall. I 'm a real little girl. It was your fault and Mary Jane's."

"I suppose we were all to blame," said I. "But no matter, we can buy her a new cap; we have money enough, I 'm sure."

"Yes, but I had rather buy candy than caps," whined Dot.

"Mary Jane," said Beth, "if you and Dot will give your money we will have two dollars together. How much do you suppose caps cost?"

"I dunno," answered Dot; "I never buy 'em."

At that we all laughed; and Beth said they were ugly things anyhow, and ought not to be more than a dollar and a half. In that case, we would have fifty cents left to spend.

Pretty soon we came to a place where they had bonnets in a window, and we thought they would be likely to keep caps there too.

"Mary Jane, you ought to ask," said Beth; "you are the oldest."

"I 'm only two weeks older than you," said I, "and I 've done enough things to make up for those two weeks long ago."

"Well, if not the oldest, the youngest, then; the middle person never does anything," Beth said, with a nod at Dot.

There are folks who slip out of everything, and Beth Hall is one. I was glad when Dot said, —

"But it is n't my grandma's cap. I think Beth ought to ask for it."

"Come, Mary Jane," cried Beth, "I *dare* you to do it."

Of course I *had* to do it then. "I guess I 'm not afraid," I said, and walked right into the shop.

There were two girls behind the show case, and I said to one of them, "I 've come to look at caps."

They looked at each other and began to laugh in a most disagreeable way, and one of them asked: "For yourself, madam?"

I knew she was making fun of me, and was just going to say that we would go to some other shop, when Dot burst out, —

"Why, Mary Jane 's only a little girl. *She* don't wear caps. It 's for Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce, and she is so old she hain't got any hair and has to wear false teeth. Why, what are you nudging me so for, Beth? You said yourself that last winter when we had that cold snap she took her teeth out and put 'em in a glass of water one night, and in the morning she could n't eat any breakfast, 'cause they were frozen in. Oh, she is awful old, is Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce, and she *must* have a cap."

"Well, you know, there are a great many different styles of caps," said the girl to me. "What kind do you want?"

"We want a *cheap* kind," answered Beth.

I had no idea there were so many different kinds of caps. There was one very fancy one with wheat sticking out of the ruche, and a bunch of grapes on one side in a bow made of pink ribbon. We thought this cap would be very expensive, — it had so much trimming on it, — but it turned out to be the very cheapest one in the shop. I suppose that was because the ribbon was so soiled. I liked better the black one with the two lace tabs hanging down behind and a purple bow on the top, — but just think! it was seventeen dollars! Real lace, you see.

There was still another, with just a ruche and plain muslin strings, which looked, somehow, for all the world like Mrs. Bunce; but it was two dollars and would take every penny we had. So Beth took up the one with the grapes again, and said to me, —

"Oh, what shall we do, Mary Jane? I 'm afraid grandma won't like this cap."

"Did she send you to buy one for her?" asked the second girl, who was leaning over the counter and staring at us.

"Why, no!" Beth answered; "but we lost her cap coming from Tuckertown. We left it in the cars, and now we have got to buy her another."

"The poor little things!" said the first girl. "They are afraid to go home without a cap. Could n't we fix up one for them for a dollar and a half, Eliza? There 's the one that was begun for Mrs. Jonas Jones; with a ruche instead of the lace it will look very nice. I dare say they will get a scolding for losing the cap."

"Yes, indeed!" put in Beth, and I never saw her look so wretched before or since. "You had better believe my grandma will scold, with no cap to wear all day and she a-visiting, too. I dare say we won't be allowed to have any dinner at all, and I 'm so hungry."

"So am I," I said mournfully, and Dot looked ready to cry.

"There now, you just cheer up, darlings!" cried the one called Eliza, with a look at Dot, whose lips were quivering beautifully, "we will fix up a nice cap for you, all for one dollar and a half."

While she was at work, we looked again at the other cap. "I don't believe my grandma would wear it," began Beth. "It 's an awful queer-looking thing, anyhow!"

"Is n't it? — with those horrid grapes and that wheat and faded ribbon. I guess your grandma would think we have n't very good taste, but anybody would like *this* one," said I, and the girl who had just finished it held it up, exclaiming: "There, that 's a bargain for you at one dollar and a half!"

"I should say it was," cried an awful voice from the door. "Eliza Shaw, what do you mean by selling that cap for a dollar and a half?"

We saw at once that the new-comer was the owner of the shop, and that she was as mad as a hornet, besides.

"They can't pay but a dollar and a half," said the girl, but her face turned very red as she spoke.

"Well, let them have the one with the grapes and the pink ribbon, then, that 's a dollar and a half, and the only one in the store for that ridiculous price!"

The girl put the nice cap she had made for us in a box, and held out the other one, saying: "Well, this is the best I can do for you, then, after all."

Beth looked at me, and I looked at Beth, while Dot said: "I 'm sure it 's good enough."

"I hope your grandma will think so," said I to Beth.

"Well, maybe she will," sighed Beth, gloomily. "She called *me* an ungrateful girl, the other day, 'cause I said I would n't wear that sunbonnet mother bought for me. So I hope she won't despise this costly, handsome cap."

"Yes, a nice, handsome cap, with grapes and lots of trimming on it!" added Dot.

While the girl had been tying the cap up for us, we had been leaning on the show case, and, just at that moment, the glass gave way with a crash beneath our arms.

"Oh, my! what a thin glass it must have been," said Beth, turning pale.

"My gracious! *Thin!*" cried the first girl. "I 'm afraid you will find it will cost you enough to have it mended. It will be ten dollars, if it 's a cent."

"But I never had so much money as that in my life!" cried Beth. "We can't pay for it!"

The woman who had refused to let us have the cap now came tearing up to us, exclaiming, —

"Give me every penny you have, and then clear out of my shop!" She seized Dot as she spoke, and we soon found ourselves standing outside on the pavement, with no money and no cap.

"Oh, what a dreadful, dreadful woman!" cried Beth, "and was n't she just as mad as a hatter!"

"You mean as mad as a *capper*," said I; but Beth was too frightened to see the joke.

In fact we were all half crying by the time we reached the house. We wondered if Mrs. Bunce would wear her bonnet all day, and Dot said she would lend her her pocket handkerchief, and welcome. But, in any case, we were prepared for a scolding.

"Why, where on earth have you been?" asked Beth's mother as we slunk into the room. "Mrs. Tibbetts said you hurried off so she could n't keep up with you."

"Why–ee —" squealed Dot, "Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce has got her cap on!"

I raised my eyes from the carpet, and lo and behold! there sat Mrs. Bunce, and on her head was the very cap we thought we had left in the cars.

"Yes; Mrs. Ithamar Tibbetts brought it," said Mrs. Bunce serenely. "The day would be spoiled for me without my cap. She said you children did n't want the trouble of it, so she brought it herself. I 'm sure I am glad I did not have to wait for it till you got here, though Lucius's wife said she would lend me a cap; but, bless me, it was such a smart-looking one, I should never think of putting it on. Pink ribbons on *me!* Oh!" gasped Grandma Bunce, with a horrified look.

Beth and I often wonder whether Mrs. Ithamar

Tibbetts brought that cap from Tuckertown, or whether we left it in the cars and she found it; but, as near as we could find out, she never told any one how we ran away from her in the depot at Providence, nor how near Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce came to losing her cap.

And, somehow, we have liked Mrs. Tibbetts a great deal better since then, and I, for one, have concluded that it is very silly to take a prejudice to a good, conscientious woman.

CHAPTER VI

BEING ARTISTIC

IT was a few weeks after we had that adventure with Mrs. Polly Ann Bunce's best cap that Aunt Jane and Aunt Prue went for a day's shopping to Providence.

" I don't see how I can go, and leave those two children," I had heard Aunt Jane say, the evening before, when I had gone upstairs; " they are sure to get into all sorts of mischief."

" Well," answered Aunt Prue, " it don't seem to me that our being here prevents that," and then everybody laughed as if it were a good joke, and grandpa said, —

" Oh, you can go if you wish to. I 'll look after the chicks; I 'll see to 'em."

" Yes, grandpa 'll see to us," piped up Dot, like a little goose. I 've always noticed it 's best not to let grown people know it, if you wish them to do things.

Said Aunt Jane: " Yes, you like to have grandpa see to you, don't you? You know *he* will let you do about as you please." Then she went on in her voice for the grown-up. "The fact is, father, you have n't any d–i–s–c–i–p–l–i–n–e. (We always spell words when we don't wish Dot to understand.) I 've half a mind not to stir a step."

Oh, dear, I was so afraid she would n't; but I never let on for a moment that I wanted to have them go.

The next morning was dark and foggy, but cleared off just in time, and at last I had the joy of seeing Aunt Jane and Aunt Prue driving off towards the station.

Now I always like to have the folks away, and no one round the house to put me out of sorts, but there was a particular reason besides that. The fact is, I had been dying for ever so long to fix up the parlor, for it was such an ugly, countrified room, and I meant to make it look real artistic. I knew I could, for I had been to Gerty Whyte's house, and her sister is an artist. I had asked Aunt Jane over and over again to let me do it, but she always said she did n't believe I could improve it much, and it did well enough for country folks as it was.

It may have done well enough, but anyhow it was dreadfully ugly. The carpet had a great deal of red in it and a centrepiece that Dot said looked like a lobster on a platter.

We were looking at it and wishing Aunt Jane would buy another, when Beth Hall, whom we had asked to come and help us, opened the door.

"Well, Mary Jane," she began, "what are you going to do first?"

"I 'd *like* to take up this horrid old carpet. Dot, would you dare to?"

"Of course she would n't, nor you either." And Beth gave that aggravating laugh of hers.

"I would too, but I sha'n't, because it 's too much trouble. But let me tell you about Gerty Whyte's parlor. In the first place, there is n't any carpet at all on the floor, only rugs, — not dowdy old rag rugs, like your mother makes, — but pretty ones."

I was out of sorts, and it was Beth's fault, because she laughed. If I had n't been out of sorts I never would have said that about her mother's rugs, for I knew she thought they were beautiful.

"Pooh! I should think you would keep tripping on them," sniffed Beth. The idea of *her* sniffing at a real artist's house.

"You most likely would if you are a clumsy bumpkin," said I. "Then they have didoes on all the walls."

“ Didoes? Well we can have them even in Tuckertown. And pray what may didoes be? ” giggled Beth.

“ You need n’t laugh, for it just shows your ignorance. Didoes are — well it ’s the thing that goes round the wall, pretty near the floor, and the frieze is the thing at the top.”

“ We had a freeze in all our rooms last January,” put in Beth. “ Below zero everywhere, except in the kitchen. Come, don’t spend any more time talking, Mary Jane; let ’s begin to fix up.”

“ Well, let ’s fix this cabinet first,” said I.

“ Cabinet! ” cried Beth and Dot, in one breath, “ why, that is the whatnot; ” and Beth went on, —

“ You need n’t look so patronizing. If folks don’t call it a whatnot, they call it an effigy or elegy or etigy or some French word that *means* whatnot; anyhow, it is n’t a cabinet.”

“ Well, no matter, let ’s *pretend* it ’s a cabinet and put china on it, because that ’s artistic.”

“ I won’t,” said Beth. “ It ’s a whatnot, and nothing but a whatnot.”

“ It ’s a cabinet,” said I, “ and not a whatnot at all.”

“ I ’ll leave it to Dot,” cried Beth.

"Pooh! Dot is n't your sister. I guess she won't mind you," said I.

"Dot Hunt, is n't it a whatnot?" screamed Beth.

Dot looked at Beth and then she looked at me, and I scowled at her, I can tell you.

"Well," said she, "it 's a whatnot *now;* but when Mary Jane fixes it up, I guess it will be a cabinet."

"That 's fair," said Beth. "Do you agree to that, Mary Jane?"

I said I did. "Let 's take the things off this old whatnot, so we can have our nice new cabinet," I proposed, and then we all went to work.

We put the things in a basket. Daguerreotypes, shells, the wax pond lily, Parian pitcher, the vases from the dollar store and all. There was a picture of Uncle John Jacobs hanging over the fireplace, and I took it down and hung it at one side with a plate stuck at one corner, and some feathers out of Aunt Jane's peacock feather duster, behind. That side of the mantel did look ever so much like Gertrude's, and I said so.

"What did she have at the other end?" asked Beth.

"She had a big brownish jug, sort of a squatty one, and it was full of sunflowers. The feathers flopped one way and the sunflowers the other."

"Lots of sunflowers in our cornfield," said Beth. "Our chickens are artistic, and they like them."

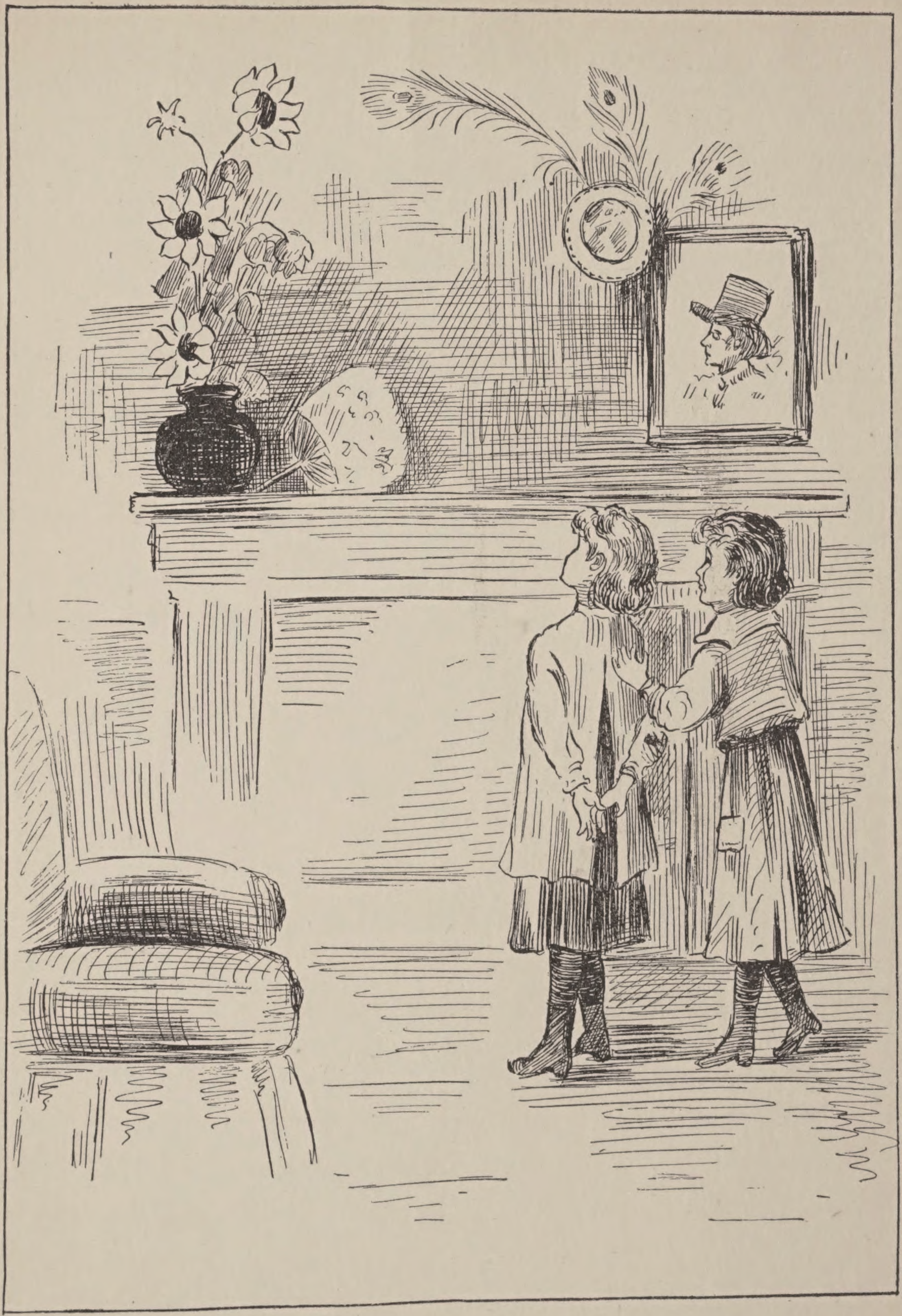
Dot said she would run and get some if we only had a jug.

"Might use the bean-pot," giggled Beth. "Sounds just like one."

"It don't, and I don't care if it does. It did look something like a bean-pot, too, now I think of it. Well, we can have *that.*" So I sent Dot for the sunflowers and when they were arranged, Beth confessed that the mantel-shelf looked very artistic. The cabinet, too, was a great success, and I felt encouraged.

Gerty's sister had a lot of her pictures tacked up, sort of careless, on the wall. One was of Venus de Milo. It was a real queer-looking thing, and I told Gerty I did n't believe any lady ever looked so bad as that, but she said it must be right, because her sister had drawn it from life. Anyhow, I think the colored plates in the old Godey books are prettier, and I brought a stack of them down from the garret, and we nailed them round on the walls.

By noon the room was finished, and it looked real nice. Anyhow, it looked a good deal like Gerty's. I found a spinning-wheel upstairs which I put in the corner near the fireplace. I told Beth I



"BETH CONFESSED THAT THE MANTEL-SHELF LOOKED VERY ARTISTIC."—*Page 58.*

wished we had something as nice for the other corner.

"Why not get the churn," said she, nudging Dot.

But the best of the whole was the dido. I made it out of the daguerreotypes, for we found a whole boxful up in the garret, besides those that were on the whatnot. There was grandpa in a queer coat and the most *awful* dickey, and grandma with a pointed waist and a brooch as big as a platter. There was Uncle John Jacobs's first wife's children, and grandma's baby that died in a fit. The queerest was one of Aunt Jane and Aunt Prue when they were children, with ringlets and pantalets, and looking scared out of their wits. I would like to see them look scared now. It was a perfectly splendid dido.

But though the room looked so nice I felt very uncomfortable, and I kept wondering what Aunt Jane *would* say.

We went in wading in the brook that afternoon; but I did n't have a good time. Beth and Dot kept taking sides against me, and then said I was cross. I did n't have a good time at all.

"I believe you are afraid of your aunt," said Beth. "I guess she 'll scold well."

"Pooh! I 'm not afraid of *her,* but she is real impolite and disagreeable to me sometimes," I admitted. "Just think, when I 'm visiting here. Once, she said I was an unregenerate child of sin."

"Goodness," cried Beth, "I would n't stand that."

"It 's swearing, is n't it?" said Dot.

"And she made me go to bed at six o'clock one night," I went on. "I guess she was sorry for it the next morning for she gave me a piece of apple pie for breakfast; but I would n't touch it, and I was just as dignified as I could be. I would n't speak all day. *She* said I was sulky; but that 's just her countrified way of expressing herself."

At last, just about sundown, Beth said she must go home. I told her we would walk part of the way with her.

"Let 's go down and see the stage come in," she proposed. "It will be fun to see the ministers."

"Why, what ministers?" asked I.

"Oh, don't you know a part of the convention is coming here from Providence? I suppose some of the ministers will come up in the stage."

"Then Aunt Jane and Aunt Prue will come up with them," said Dot.

So we went down to the village and sat in a row on Deacon Green's stone wall, which is just opposite the stage office; and in a few moments we saw the stage coming up the hill. My, was n't it full, though! and besides the stage there were three wagons, all chuck-full of ministers.

"Oh, there 's Dr. Brinnell, from the Centre," cried Beth. "Let 's choose ministers. I choose him."

"I choose that fat, jolly one looking out of the window," said I. "He is my minister."

"Oh, I choose that cunning little one," screamed Dot, and so loud that all the ministers heard her and laughed, and the little one Dot chose blushed as red as a beet. Then they got out of the stage, Aunt Jane and Aunt Prue last of all.

I jumped off the wall then. "If we stay here, Aunt Jane will call us and make us go home with her. I wonder if she will go into the parlor right off," I said, and after Beth left us I added: "and I wonder if she will be mad."

"Oh, my, yes," answered Dot, "'course she will, but it was n't our fault. It was grandpa's, 'cause he did n't see to us as he promised."

There was a great bustle in the kitchen, getting supper. Aunt Prue, in her best cap, was making coffee, and Aunt Jane had not changed her black silk for her everyday dress. She was so polite to *me* I knew at once she had not been in the parlor, and I was screwing up my courage to tell her what we had done, when there was a knock at the front door.

"There they come," she exclaimed, as Aunt Prue flew to open it.

"There who comes?" asked Dot.

"Why, Mr. Kipp and Dr. Jones and Mr. Holt and the other ministers whom we invited to stay with us."

I ran out into the hall just in time to see a long line of black legs filing into the parlor; and as I peeped through the crack of the door I could plainly see the smile that passed over each face, while, as true as you live, Dot's minister was looking out of the window and giggling.

As for Aunt Prue, she is as blind as a bat without her specs, and never noticed the changes that had taken place in the room.

But just then, Aunt Jane in her rustling, black silk came sailing from the dining-room into the parlor.

She began to speak — and stopped.

Her eyes fell upon the bean-pot.

"What under the canopy," said she to Aunt Prue, "have those children been about?" and then everybody began to laugh, and Dot, who had followed Aunt Jane from the kitchen, cried out, —

"You need n't laugh, 'cause Mary Jane says it 's real artistic."

I was n't allowed to go to the tea-table, but in the evening my minister — the one I had chosen — asked to see me; and I told him all about Gertrude's house, and how I had tried to make our parlor as cheerful and pretty as hers was.

That night I had a dream. I thought I was in the parlor, and the ministers had gone, and the lights were out. All at once I noticed that the sunflowers and the peacock feathers were alive and whispering together.

Said a gossipy old sunflower with her head on one side, —

"Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous as our being here in this bean-pot? It is plain to be seen that those city children can't tell a sunflower from a bean-vine."

"Don't speak of those city children," answered a peacock's feather, with a shiver. "If you lived in the house with them, you would know how they behave. As for that Mary Jane, she is a trial to her aunt, I can tell you. It 's all very well to try and make one's home beautiful; but with a bad heart and selfish nature *that* is impossible."

"Ah, yes; ah, yes," murmured the sunflower, "it takes a deal of sunshine to make things beautiful. I 've lived in it all my life and I ought to know."

In the morning, when I told my dream to Aunt Prue, she said it was the first one she had ever heard with a moral to it; but Dot declares the sunflower and peacock's feathers only repeated what my minister had said, when I told him about Gerty Whyte's house, and how I had tried to make ours look just like it.

CHAPTER VII

A VISIT TO MARY JANE — FROM THE PEN OF BETH HALL

WHEN Mary Jane Hunt left Tuckertown last summer she invited me to come to the city and make her a visit.

"If I were sure Mrs. Hunt wanted you, 'Liz'beth, I would like to have you go," said mother, "for it 's good for young folks to widen their horizon, now and then, and you would enjoy seeing the sights."

I did n't care anything about my horizon, but I did want most awfully to see the sights; but, although I teased and teased, mother would n't let me go.

There was a great church quarrel in Tuckertown that year, but our folks were n't in it. The trouble began in the choir, who could n't agree about the tunes. On some Sundays the organist would n't play, and on others the singers would n't sing. Once they all stopped short in the middle of "Greenland's Icy Mountains," and it was real exciting at church, for you never knew what might happen before you came out; but folks said it was disgraceful, and I suppose it was. They complained of the minister because he did n't put a stop to it; so at last he took sides with the organist and dismissed the choir, and declared we would have congregational singing in the future. 'Most everybody thought that would be the end of the trouble; but, mercy! it was hardly the beginning! Things grew worse and worse. To begin with, the congregation would n't sing. You see, they had had a choir so long people were sort of afraid to let out their voices; and, besides, there was Elvira Tucker, who had studied music in Boston, just ready to make fun of them if they did. For she was one of the choir, and they were all as mad as hornets.

In fact, the whole Tucker family were offended. They said folks did n't appreciate Elvira, nor what she had done, since she returned from Boston, to raise the standard in Tuckertown. I don't know, I am sure, what they meant by that, for I never saw Elvira raise any standard; but I do know that they were real mad with the minister, and lots of people took their side and called 'emselves "Tuckerites."

You see, the Tuckers stand very high in Tuckertown, and other people try to be just as like them as they can. They were first settlers, for one thing, and have the most money, for another; and they lay down the law generally. The post-office and the station are at *their* end of the village. *They* decide when the sewing-societies shall meet, and the fairs take place, and the strawberry festivals come off. If there is to be a picnic, *they* decide when we shall go, and where we shall go, and just who shall sit in each wagon. If anybody is sick, Mrs. Tucker visits 'em just as regularly as the doctor, and she brings grapes and jelly, and is very kind, though she always scolds the sick person for not dieting, or for going without her rubbers, or something of that sort. If mother had a hand in this story, not a word of all this would go down. She says they are very public-spirited people, and that they do a great deal for Tuckertown. I suppose they do; but I 've heard other people say that they domineer much more than is agreeable.

The people on the minister's side were called "Anti-Tuckerites"; but, as I said, our folks were n't in the quarrel at all. The consequence of being on the fence was, that I could not join in the fun on either side, and I think it was real mean.

Every now and then the Tuckerites would plan some lovely picnic or party, just so as not to invite the Anti-Tuckerites. Then, in turn, *they* would get up an excursion, and not invite any of the Tuckerites. Of course, *I* was n't invited to either, and it was just as provoking as it could be.

One day, when I went to school, I found that Elvira Tucker was going to train a choir of children to take the place of the old choir.

"I went over to call on Elvira last evening," I heard Miss Green tell our school-teacher, "and I found her at the piano, playing for little Nell to sing. It was just at dusk, and they did not see me; so I stood and listened, and wondered why we could n't have a choir of children instead of the congregational singing. Elvira said she thought it would be lovely."

Now, I had been to singing-school for two winters, and the singing master said I had a good voice; so I thought I ought to belong to the choir.

"You can't 'cause only Tuckerites are going to belong," said 'Melia Stone. "And your folks are just on the fence. They are n't one thing or another."

I could n't stand being left out of all the fun any longer, so I said: "I 'm as much a Tuckerite as anybody, only our folks don't approve of making so much trouble about a small affair."

"I want to know!" said Abby Ann Curtiss. "Well, if that 's so, I 'll ask Miss Elvira if you can't belong."

Mercy me! I had jumped from the fence and found myself a *Tuckerite!* I was sure mother would be real mad if she knew what I had said, for I suspected in my heart of hearts that if she had jumped from the fence she would have landed on the minister's side. I made up my mind that I would not tell her what had passed, for maybe, after all, Miss Elvira would decide that I was no real Tuckerite. But the very next day she sent word to me by Abby Ann that she would like to have me join the choir.

I told mother that I was wanted in the children's choir because I had a good voice, and I never said a word about being a Tuckerite.

"A children's choir," said she. "That 's a real good idea. Beautiful!"

She never suspected how I was deceiving her.

Well, we had real fun practising. That week we learned a chant and two hymns.

One day Mrs. Green came in.

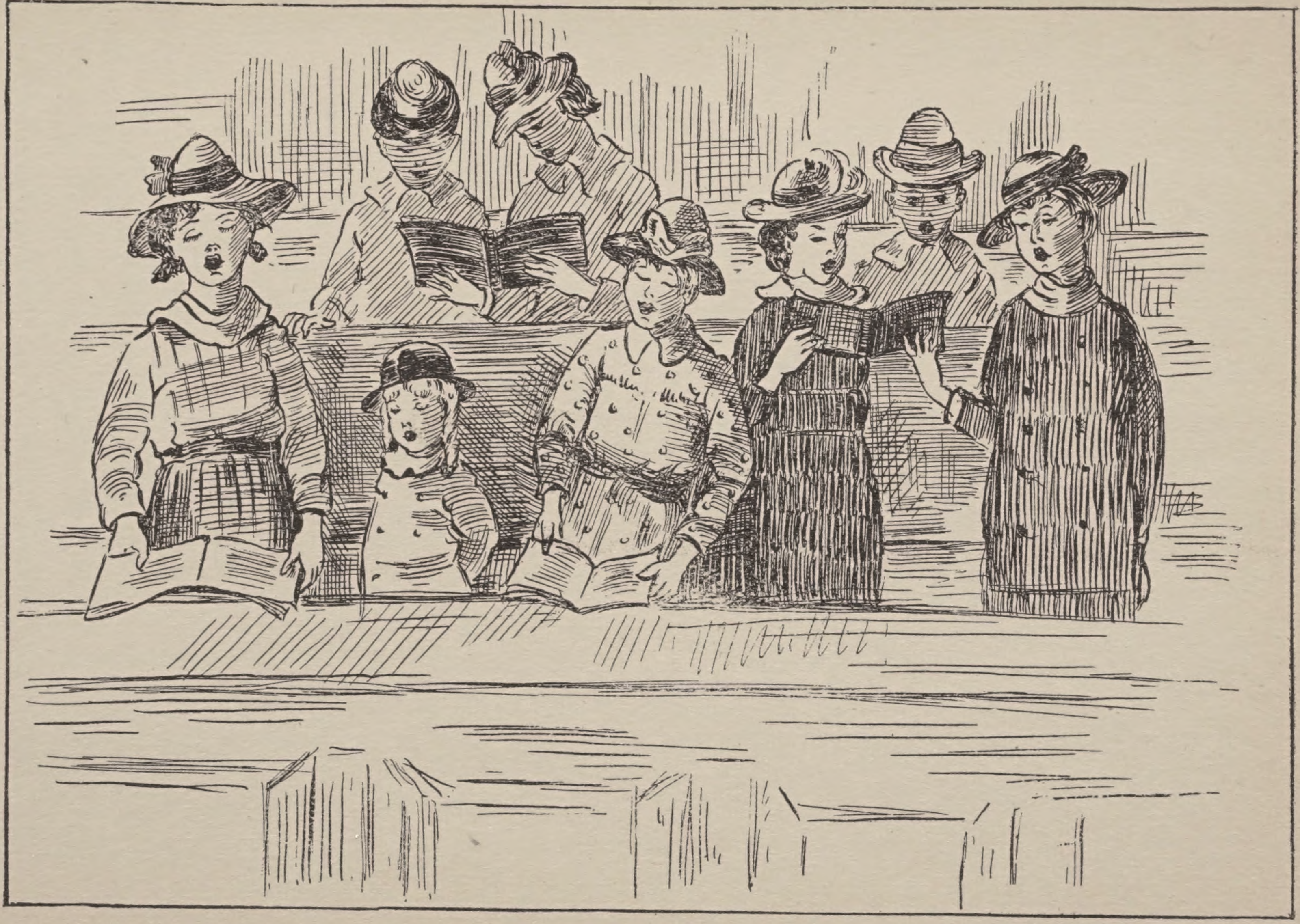
"How does *she* happen to be here?" I heard her ask Elvira, with a significant look at me.

"Oh, she has a real good voice," answered Miss Elvira, laughing. "Most of the children who can sing are on the other side; besides, from something she said to Abby Ann I think at heart the Halls sympathize with us."

What would my folks have said to that? I felt half sick of the whole affair, and went home and teased mother to let me go to the city and visit Mary Jane.

I shall never forget the Sunday I sang in the choir. Miss Elvira played for us on the organ, for when the real organist heard that only the Tuckerite children were to belong to it she refused to play. Everybody seemed surprised to see me in it, and even Dr. Scott looked at me in a mournful sort of a way, as if he thought the Halls had gone over to the enemy. What troubled me most, though, was the look mother gave me when she first realized that the choir was formed only of the Tuckerites, and that she had not found it out before.

But in spite of all this I enjoyed the singing. We sat, long rows of us, in the singers' seats up in the gallery. After the hymn was given out and we stood up, Miss Elvira nodded to me and whispered: "Now, don't be afraid, girls; sing as loud as you can."



"MERCY! HOW WE DID SING! TWICE AS LOUD AS THE GROWN-UP CHOIR."—*Page 71.*

Mercy, how we did sing! twice as loud as the grown-up choir. Luella Howe said, afterwards, that we looked as if we were trying to swallow the meeting-house.

But I never sang but just that once in the choir, for the next Sunday I spent with Mary Jane, in Boston.

The way it happened was this: That night mother sent me to bed right after supper, as a punishment for not telling her about the choir before I joined it; and as I undressed she had a great deal to say about the defects in my character. She talked to me a long time and went downstairs at last without kissing me good-night. I was thinking what a miserable sinner I must be, and trying to cry about it, when I heard her go into the sitting-room and say to father, who was reading his paper there, —

"I've just put 'Liz'beth to bed; but I don't know as she is so much to blame, after all. If grown people act in such a way you can't expect much of the children. I declare, I wish I could send her away from Tuckertown till this choir business is settled."

"Well," says father, "why don't you let her go and see Hunt's girl? You know she invited her, and 'Liz'beth wants to go."

"Oh, no," says mother; "they have so much sickness there, I 'm afraid she would be in the way." And she ended her sentence by shutting the door with a slam.

I got right up and sat on the stairs for a long time, to see if they would say anything more about my visiting Mary Jane; but they did n't. Father began to talk of the black heifer he had just bought, and then about the Presidential campaign, and several other unimportant things like that. Not a word about me.

But I began early the next morning and teased steadily to go and visit Mary Jane. Finally, Tuesday morning, mother said I might write Mary Jane, that if it were perfectly agreeable to her mother I would now make them the promised visit; and, if I heard nothing to the contrary from them, would start on Friday in the early train for Boston.

Well, Tuesday passed, and Wednesday came, and Thursday came, and at last — at last Friday came, and no letter from Mary Jane. My trunk was all packed. I took my best dress and my second best dress, and most of the everyday ones, and mother lent me her hair jewelry. I had my shade hat, and my common one, and my too-good hat (that last is one I 've had for years — ever so many years —

fully two years, I guess) ; and it 's always too good to wear anywhere, and that 's why it lasts so long. At the last mother declared she was sorry she had ever consented to let me go, for she was afraid Mrs. Hunt did n't like to write that my coming would be inconvenient. She declared that I ought to have written that I would go if I heard that it would be agreeable. I had fifty frights that morning before I was finally put in Deacon Green's care in the cars; for he, too, was going to Boston that day.

He promised my mother that, if no one was at the depot for me, he would put me in a carriage, so that I should get safely to Mrs. Hunt's house.

I was real mad to have him tag along — it would have been such fun to travel alone, and I did hope, when he stood so long on the platform talking to father, the cars would go off without him; but he jumped on just as they were starting. However, when we finally got to Boston, and I found that nobody was waiting for me there, I was glad enough to have him with me.

I must say, as I rode along in the carriage, I thought it was real queer for no one to come to meet me; but the city was so interesting I had forgotten about it by the time we stopped at the Hunt's door.

The house had a kind of shut-up look, and I felt queer for a moment, as I thought, perhaps, they were all away from home; but just then Mary Jane flew down the steps, and Dot came squealing behind her.

"Now, you just hush!" said Mary Jane to her, after she had kissed me. "You wake up Lucy, and see what you 'll get." (She is always awfully domineering to Dot, Mary Jane is.)

"Why, what 's the matter with Lucy?" I asked. "Why is she asleep in the daytime?"

"Why, she is sick," said Mary Jane.

"Oh, awful sick!" cried Dot.

"'T is n't catching, though; so come right in, Beth," added Mary Jane, and in we went.

She had the hackman carry my trunk up into her room; and she went up behind him all the way, ordering him to be quiet, and slapping Dot, and holding up her finger at me, and making more noise herself than all the rest of us put together.

"You see, I have to take care of everything," she said, when we were up at last. "Mother has to stay with Lucy all the time, and Dot is so thoughtless. But what have you got in your trunk?"

"Yes, why don't you unpack?" asked Dot.

It took me some time to get to the bottom of my trunk, but I showed them everything that was in it. After that Mary Jane said she must go and see about tea. When we got downstairs we found the table set.

"Why, there 's no preserves on it," said Mary Jane to Bridget, who tossed her head, and answered, —

"Your ma did n't order any, and I won't open 'em without her telling me."

"Oh, my!" cried Mary Jane; "you are very particular just now, are n't you? You don't mind so much when your aunt's stepmother's cousin comes."

Bridget turned as red as a beet. "Now jist you take yourselves out of my kitchen!" said she; and as true as you live she shut the door right in my face.

"Hateful old thing!" cried Mary Jane. "Well, never mind, I 'm going to the china-closet to get some. But which do you like best, — peach preserves or raspberry jam?"

"Peach preserves, o' course," answered Dot; "everybody does."

I don't see why Dot had to say that. It was just enough, and I knew it would be, to make Mary Jane take the jam. When we went back to the dining-room we found Susan (that 's the nurse) had come in with the baby.

" Here, Mary Jane," said she, " your ma said you were to take care of Baby while I 'm upstairs."

Mary Jane looked as cross as two sticks. " Oh, bother! I can't! I have Dot to take care of, and Beth, and the house, and everything. Bridget ought to do that."

But just then Mr. Hunt came down. He looked real worried, but he spoke to me just as kind, and asked after the Tuckertown folks. I tried to tell him about the singing affair, but he did n't seem to take much interest, and soon went upstairs again.

" He has n't eaten any of his supper," said Dot. " I 'm going to give his jam to Baby."

The baby had been sitting in a high chair up to the table, and had n't had a thing but a piece of graham cracker to eat. I thought he was real good.

" He can't have any jam. Here, give it to me," said Mary Jane; " I 'll eat it."

Of course at that he banged his cracker on the floor, and began to cry for the jam. But Mary Jane did n't take the slightest notice of him; she went on eating the jam as calmly as if he was asleep in his cradle. Dot had been sent out on an errand, so I tried to amuse him; but he was afraid of me, and screamed louder than before.

"Don't pay any attention to him," said Mary Jane. "I 'm going to break him of screaming so much; I always longed to break him of it, and at last I 've got a chance. When he finds no one takes any notice of him he 'll stop it, I guess."

While he was screaming, Mrs. Hunt came down. She had on her wrapper, and her hair was just bobbed up, and she looked as if she had n't slept for a month.

"Mary Jane, why don't you amuse him?" she said, after she had shaken hands with me, and had taken Baby in her arms. "You know that the noise disturbs Lucy, and yet you 'll let him cry."

"It 's too bad," said I. "I would amuse him, only he is afraid of me."

"Why, I 'll amuse him, of course," said Mary Jane.

So her mother went upstairs again, and we had that child on our hands till seven o'clock, when Susan came and took him to bed.

The next morning I told Mary Jane that I thought I ought to go home.

"Oh, no!" she begged. "You are here, and you might as well stay, and Lucy will be better soon."

"Oh," said Dot, "don't go! You can help us take care of Baby, you know."

"I don't see how I can be in your mother's way when I hardly ever see her," said I. "Besides, it would be real mean to leave you while you are in trouble." So I decided to stay.

I should have had a splendid time of it, had it not been for the baby; but we never began any interesting play but Susan would come and leave him with us, and then he always had to be amused. I never saw such a child — never quiet a moment. They said it was because he was so bright. If I ever have a child, I hope it will be one of the stupid kind, that will sit on the floor and suck its thumb all day.

He was particularly in the way when we went to see the sights. We went to the State House and the Art Museum, and one day Mary Jane showed me a place where they were having a baby show.

"Mercy!" said Mary Jane, "*who* would ever want to go to that?"

"Lots o' people are going in, anyhow," said Dot.

We had started on, but all at once Mary Jane stopped short. "'Liz'beth," said she, "I'll tell you what, let's take Baby to the baby show. I mean to exhibit him, and p'raps he 'll take a prize, and we will have the money."

Was n't it a splendid idea? The trouble was, we did n't know how to get in. At last Mary Jane told the ticket-master what we wanted, and he sent for the manager.

"And so you want to put this little chap in the show," said he. "How old is he?"

Mary Jane told him.

"Well, he *is* a whopper," said the man.

"Is it too late for him to get the prize?" we asked.

"Oh, he won't stand so good a chance as if he had come at first. You see, the babies are all numbered, and each person, when he goes out of the show, gives the number of the baby he thinks is the finest, and the one that has the most votes, so to speak, gets the prize. Those folks that came yesterday, you see, have n't voted for *your* baby; but then you 'll have part of to-day and to-morrow."

"Why, will we have to stay all the time?" asked Mary Jane.

"No, you can take him out when you choose; but the more he is here the more votes he 'll get."

"Well, if there 's a prize for the baby that can cry loudest, he 'll get it," said Dot.

But they did n't give any prize for that.

We gave Baby's name and address to the manager, who then took us in to the show. His number was three hundred and twelve, and a paper telling his age and number of teeth, and so on, was tacked over the little booth where we sat.

There were lots of people in the room, but when any one came near *our* baby he cried.

"I do believe he won't get a single vote," said Mary Jane in despair. But somebody gave him some candy, and that pacified him for a while, and ever so many persons said he was the finest child in the show. We were so encouraged, we planned just how we would spend the money, and we stayed till dinner-time, when Mary Jane thought we ought to go home.

Mrs. Hunt was real pleased that we had kept him out so long. It was a pleasant day, she said, and the air would do him good.

"We will take him out again this afternoon," said Mary Jane.

When we went back, Baby was so tired he went to sleep in Dot's lap. They looked awful cunning, and everybody raved over them; but we had to promise Dot everything under the sun to keep her quiet.

Lucy was worse that night, and the next morning Mrs. Hunt sent us right out after breakfast. We stayed at the show all day, but the baby was n't good a bit. He screamed and kicked, and looked, oh, so red and ugly! We had to send Dot for some candy for him, and we felt worried and uncomfortable.

The doctor's carriage was at the door when we went home at last, and Mr. Hunt was walking up and down in the parlor. He called Mary Jane and Dot in, and I went upstairs, for Susan said the postman had left a letter for me. I thought it was from mother; but it was a printed thing from the Dead-letter Office, saying that a letter for me was detained there for want of postage. It had been sent to Tuckertown, and the postmaster had forwarded it to Boston. I had spent all my money, except just enough to buy my ticket home; but I thought I would take out enough for the stamps, and borrow six cents from Mrs. Hunt. I went out right off and mailed my letter, with the stamps, so as to get the other letter that was in the Dead-letter Office. When I came back I found Mary Jane crying in the hall.

Lucy was worse and the doctor had given her up.

“ And I have always been so cross to her,” sobbed Mary Jane.

“ Yes, so you have! ” put in Susan, who was coming downstairs with a tray. “ I hope you ’ll remember now to be kinder to Dot and the baby.”

“ But they are so healthy,” she sniffed. Well, she seemed to feel real bad, and it ’s no wonder, for Lucy is a darling. I could n’t help crying myself.

That night poor little three hundred and twelve was taken sick. Mr. Hunt and the doctor came to our room to ask what we had given him to eat, and when we told them of the candy (we did n’t dare say a word about the show) they were angry enough.

I sha’n’t forget that night in a hurry. I did n’t think it would ever come to an end, and we both lay and cried till the sun shone into our window in the morning, when Susan came to tell us that Lucy was sleeping beautifully, and was going to get well after all. After breakfast we went in to Mrs. Hunt’s room, which was next to the nursery, where Lucy lay, and she took us all in her arms — there was room for me, too — and we just cried with joy together.

The baby had got all over his colic, and Mary Jane and I had just concluded we had better tell her mother where we had taken him, when a letter came for Mrs. Hunt.

It was a notice that number three hundred and twelve had taken the third prize at the baby show.

It could not have come at a better time for us, for how could she scold, with Lucy coming back to life, as it were, after those dreadful hours of suspense and suffering? But I know she did scold Mary Jane afterwards; for, of course, it was not right to keep the baby in that stuffy place, when she thought he was out in the fresh air; but that was after I went home, which happened a few days later.

And what do you think! Just as the carriage came to take me to the depot, the postman left a sealed envelope from the Dead-letter Office. I opened it as the cars started, and, while I was travelling home, I read the very letter Mrs. Hunt had written in answer to the one I wrote her, to tell her I was about to visit them in Boston. And in that letter she had asked me to postpone my visit till some later date, on account of the illness of little Lucy.

CHAPTER VIII

SALLY

BRIDGET had given warning. She was going away. Said she to my mother, —

" I have n't the word of fault to be findin' wid ye, Mis' Hunt. Yer as pleasant a lady as iver I lived with, niver complainin' an' frettin'; an' the twins be rale swate little girls, an' the baby 's a darlin'. But, savin' yer presence, mem, I can't get along no ways wid Mary Jane, she 's that troublesome, mem."

" Yes," said mother, " I know she is rather trying; but — "

" Tryin'," cut in Bridget, " tryin' — an' is that what ye name it? Shure she 's a little imp, that 's what she is, an' no girl will put up wid her worrying ways. An' says I to Susan last night, I 'll be givin' Mis' Hunt warnin' to-morrow, an' put the door between us this day week."

" There, Mary Jane," cried mother, as Miss Bridget flounced out of the room, " that is the third cook you have driven away."

Well, Bridget went, and we had no cook and mother had to do the work. One day she fainted away and fell right down on the floor in the dining-room, just as we were sitting down to dinner. Oh, my, was n't I scared that time, though! But she soon got over it, and ate her dinner with the rest of us.

Father said her nervous system was worn out, and he hoped we children did not give her trouble; and he looked at me; but I was eating my dinner, and pretended I did n't see him.

I felt real sorry about Bridget after mother fainted, and wanted to do something to help her. So I offered to make some fruit cake while she dusted the parlor, and told Susan I would iron mother's fluted wrapper while she took Baby out for a walk.

Mother had engaged a cook before Bridget left to take her place; but she never came, and another one disappointed us after that. It was then I decided that I would go and get one myself.

"Why," said Dot, to whom I confided what I was going to do, "you don't know how."

"Oh, my, what a goose you are! Why, I shall go to the Intelligence Office, of course."

"Let me go too," begged Dot.

I thought she might as well go, and that very afternoon we went. On the way there I asked Dot if she thought we had better get a Catholic girl.

"Oh, no," said she; "I do not like them, for they burn insects to their church."

I suppose she meant incense.

We found there were a great many different girls at the Intelligence Office to choose from, and I told the man in charge there that I had come to engage a cook.

"What wages do you give?" he asked, and the girls began to giggle.

"Oh, my," cried Dot, "you don't know, do you, Mary Jane?"

"Of course I do. We give three dollars a month."

"Oh, my," said Dot, "see 'em all toss their heads."

"I guess you mean three dollars a *week,*" put in the Intelligence man.

I thought I did.

"Well," said he, "you sit down, and I will send one here to talk with you."

So Dot and I sat down and watched him go from one to another. When he spoke to them they all shook their heads, and one said very loud, —

"No, sir, I don't care to try. I ain't agoing to any place where they have children." And another said, "A quare sort of a lady as would send a bit choild loike that to engage a gurrell." But by and by he found one that thought she might try it.

"How many in the family?" said she, as she sat down on the bench opposite us.

"Well, there 's my father — " I began, when she interrupted me by asking, —

"How many shirts does he wear the week?"

"Oh, I *don't* know," said I, "just as many as you want him to."

"Can you make nice rich cake?" asked Dot.

But I hushed her. Then said I to the girl, —

"Why did you leave your last place?"

"Well, 't was at the shore, miss, an' I thought the sea air was too embracin' for me."

"Are you good-natured?" I asked next.

"Do you drink?" put in Dot.

"Do you take the sugar home to your mother?" said I.

"Oh, my sakes," burst out Dot, "how mad you do look."

Mad! I should think so. She jumped right up, screaming, —

"I would n't live with the likes of yez at no price," and flounced off, Dot crying after her, —

"We would n't have *you,* if you 'd come for nothing, for you can't make nice rich cake."

Well, I talked with lots of them after that, but they none of them wanted to live where there were so many children in the family.

"So they won't any of them suit," said the man, leaning on my chair. "How would you like a colored girl?"

"Oh, I don't believe my mother would want a colored girl," said I. "We 've never had them."

"Then I think you had better try one. The best families all have colored help nowadays. Here, Sally."

Dot nudged me as the colored girl came up, and said in a loud whisper, "I like her, Mary Jane, let 's have her."

She did look real pleasant.

"Can you make pies?" I asked.

"Lor', yes, chile. Ise fuss-rate cook."

"There 's five in the family," said Dot, "and most of them are children."

"I likes chillens, they 's company fur me."

"Do you like them round in the kitchen?" said I, "and have you got a character? and do you drink?"

" Lor's, how you talk now; course I don't."

" Well, you are engaged," said I. " When can you come? "

She said she would come right away — just as soon as she got her bundle. So Dot and I went home with her, for I would n't wait for her at the corner as she wished, for fear she would n't come back.

" 'T is n't anything at all to get a girl," said I to Dot, as we all walked home. " I don't believe one word about it being so hard to keep house. I know I could do it. And I would never go a whole week without a cook when there are whole Intelligence Offices full of 'em. Won't mother be pleased when she sees we have got one for her."

" Well," said Dot, with a sidelong glance at Sally, " she 's black, you know. But it is n't her fault, is it? and, besides, the man says she is a treasure."

The first person we saw when we got home was Susan. She was sweeping down the stairs in the hall, and opened the door for us.

The minute I saw her, I knew just how it would be. She would make a fuss. Susan is an American girl, and says she is as good as anybody, and she thinks she is a great deal better. A respectable American girl. *That 's* what she calls herself.

"Well, who have you been picking up now, I should like to know?" said she, with a real disagreeable look at our treasure. "What do you want, young woman?"

"Get out of the way, Susan," said I. "Where 's mother?"

"Your mother is lying down on the sofy. And your pa is with her, and you just let her have a moment's peace. As for this young colored person, she can just tramp off."

But just then the sitting-room door opened, and I screamed out, —

"Say mother, I 've got a cook, and she is a perfect treasure, and Susan says she sha'n't stay."

Well, mother came out quick enough. She looked at Susan, and then at Sally, and then at Susan again, and gasped out: "Why, what do you mean, child? Where did you get her?"

"At the Intelligence Office, mum. An' sure she 's a foine cook," said I.

"And 't is n't any matter if she is black," cried Dot, "because she is a treasure. The man said so."

"No, 't is n't my fault 'cause Ise a culled pusson," whimpered Sally, "and Ise a fuss-class cook, I is."

"Yes, she is real pleasant," cried Dot, "and likes to have children round in the kitchen. You are hurting her feelings dreadfully;" and Dot flung herself onto Sally and began to cry.

All this time Susan stood scowling, and mother looking as if she did n't know which way to turn. But when the baby cried, and Susan went upstairs, I burst out, —

"Mother, do let Sally stay. You said you had half a mind to let Susan sleep in the nursery and take care of Baby nights, so you could rest better. If you do that, Sally can have the Great Mogul Susan's room, and I don't see why they could n't get along well enough."

And that 's the way it was finally settled. Thanks to me, at last we had a cook; but though I had taken all that trouble to get her, no one seemed very grateful, or to realize how the whole burden of the housekeeping falls on me.

One thing, the new cook never complains of me, as the old ones used to do, and mother often says, —

"To be sure, Sally is the most incompetent, careless, wasteful, impertinent girl I ever had in the house, but she *can* get along with Mary Jane."

CHAPTER IX

MRS. MELANCTHON BENNER

IF there is anybody in this world that I am afraid of, it is mother's friend, Mrs. Melancthon Benner.

I often think how queer it is, that although she is so very particular about my friends, mother never seems to care whether I approve of hers or not. It 's well that she does not, too, for they are not at all to my fancy. They are such a dowdy lot, and I don't much mind about folks being intelligent.

To begin with, there is Mrs. Harvey Cutter; the homeliest woman! and she is always saying to me: " If you were *my* little girl, I should make you do so and so " (some horrid thing), or " if I were your mother, I would not allow you to do so and so." No, I don't like her at all. Then there is Mrs. Butler who makes such long calls just before dinner time; who hangs on half an hour after she says she must go, and half an hour longer out in the hall, and tops off with fifteen minutes on the doorsteps. I don't think Mrs. Flagg is a nice person for mother to be with. Her influence is n't good. Once she influenced her not to let us children eat cake between meals. She is always saying things are unhealthy! that they injure the coat of one's stomach, or are too stimulating to the nervous system, or ruin the digestive organs. As for Mrs. Brown, she can talk of nothing but her daughter in Rome. She always brings a lot of letters from her in her bag, and she reads every one of them through, although they are only about the places she visits and such uninteresting things. She always writes that she is sitting by the open window, and that they are having peaches, plums, cherries, apricots, and so on.

But they are none of them so awful as Mrs. Melancthon Benner. Her eyes go right through you — they do — and when she speaks it fairly makes you jump. Even grown people are rather afraid of her, although they won't own it, but are always telling how kindhearted she is, and that they don't mind her "*way*."

Mamie Whyte, although she is her own niece, owns that she is dreadfully afraid of her. She says when she goes to her house at Breezy Cove visiting, sometimes, in the summer, she just grows thin, she is so afraid of doing something her aunt won't like.

Well, one day Mrs. Benner invited mother to make her a visit, and she invited Dot and me to come too. I suppose mother would have been much better pleased to go alone, but she had to take us because Mrs. Benner said so.

I was delighted that I was to go, for I had n't seen much of Mrs. Benner then, and I knew her house was right on the beach.

I told mother that we children would stay out of doors all the time, so she need n't worry about our getting into mischief.

Said mother: " I never saw the place yet, Mary Jane, where *you* could n't get into mischief; but if I let you go I shall expect you to behave as well as you know how all the time we are there." And she said I was n't to leave my pocket-handkerchief around, or interrupt people, and must always think before I did anything whether it would be agreeable to Mrs. Benner.

It was perfectly lovely at Breezy Cove. The house looked right out on the ocean, and the beach was n't a stone's throw from the house. On one side was a lovely pine grove, and farther down on the beach some famous old cliffs. I felt sure that I should enjoy every minute I spent there.

They came to the station for us with a jolly span of bay horses, and Mamie was waiting on the piazza of the house to meet me, —

"Just think," said she, "Aunt Matilda was n't going to invite you, at all, at first. Only just your mother and Dot. She likes Dot, because she is so pretty. But one day Miss Jenkins was here talking about you, and Aunt Matilda said you were a remarkably plain child, but she thought you were smart, and she had a mind to invite you here with your mother and Dot. I thought I had better tell you; and now you must remember and be real smart, Mary Jane."

"Well," said I, "it 's just as easy for me to be smart as anything. Why, Mamie Whyte, I just can't help it. Sometimes when I am talking, and not thinking one thing about it, everybody bursts out laughing, and I know I 've been smart again."

"I wish I could say funny things," said Mamie. "I never did but just once, and then, was n't it too bad? I forgot what it was, and never could say it again."

The first few days I got on beautifully at Breezy Cove. We went in bathing every day, and we drove and had picnics in the grove, and Mamie and I used to say before we dared even to sit down in a chair, "Now, will this be agreeable to Mrs. Benner?"

To be sure, once I did upset her work-basket, but she was not in the room, and we picked everything up before she came back. But I don't think she liked me much, after all, for she never smiled when I said smart things, and Mamie confessed that she had called me a very forward child. At any rate, I did n't get into one speck of mischief until just at the last, and then — But that 's what I am going to tell about.

One day, Mrs. Benner and mother were going to Hillvery. There were stores there, and mother wished to do some shopping, and they were going to take dinner with a friend and would not be back, they said, till quite late in the evening. Mamie and I were glad, because her aunt was cross that day, and we did all we could to help them off. I even sewed a ruffle in the neck of mother's dress.

" You are getting to be a real help to me, Mary Jane," said she, when it was done. " Suppose you find my parasol, for I have n't a moment to lose, and then run down in the library and put my list, which you will find on the table there, into my purse."

I found Mamie and Dot in the library, and Dot said, —

" I wonder if mother has got any candy down on her list. You look and see, Mary Jane."

I read the list over, but mother had forgotten the candy. So I found a pen and put it down for her.

"Write a pound of nut candy, too," giggled Dot.

"And some soothing syrup for Aunt Matilda," added Mamie.

"No, that won't do," said I, "for Mrs. Benner may see the list." But Mamie, who was in high spirits that morning, seized a pen and began to chase me around the table, and I don't know how it happened, but I suppose we must have hit the inkstand, for the first thing I knew it was upside down on the elegant Persian carpet.

Just at that moment the carriage came round to the door, and we heard mother and Mrs. Benner on the stairs.

I slipped the list into the pocket-book and grabbing the parasol flew out into the hall, and soon saw the carriage drive off towards Hillvery.

Then I ran back to the library, where I found Mamie and Dot trying to wipe up the ink.

"It 's a pity," said I, "we had n't stopped to ask if *this* would be agreeable to Mrs. Benner."

"How can you laugh?" cried Mamie, trying to find a clean corner of her inky pocket-handkerchief to wipe away her tears. "I feel dreadfully."

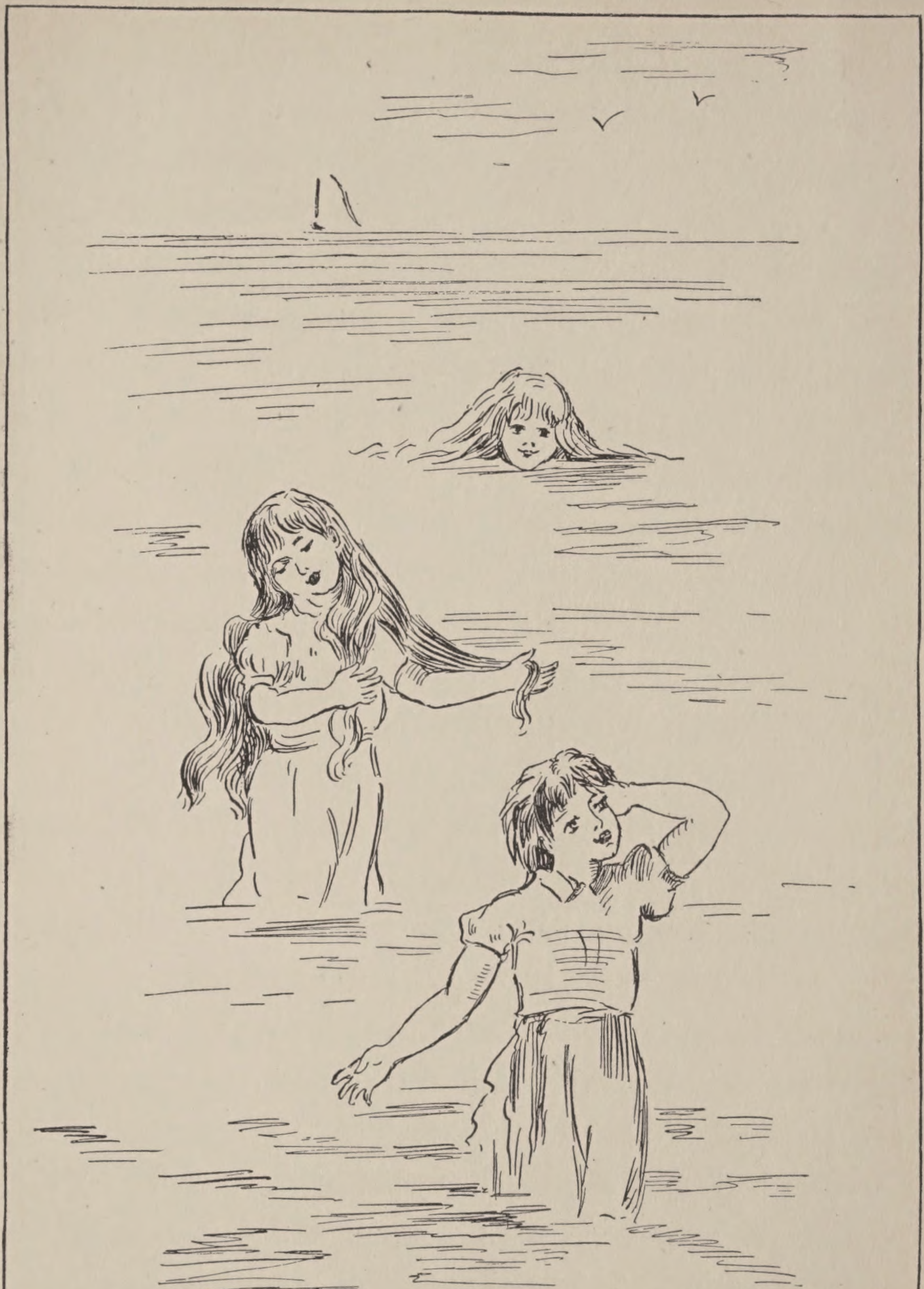
I felt dreadfully, too, if I did laugh, for I remembered that I had promised mother not to do anything to annoy Mrs. Benner while we stayed at Breezy Cove. At last I said, "Let 's go out on the beach, and perhaps we can forget all about it."

So we went out, and for a long time we walked mournfully up and down on the sand, not having the heart for any of our usual games, but wondering what Mrs. Benner would say when we told her that we had spoiled her handsome carpet.

It was a perfectly lovely day, and by and by I could not help feeling better, and Mamie said she did n't mean to worry any more, for perhaps her Aunt Matilda would not care so very much after all.

"Yes," said Dot, "perhaps she will say, 'Never mind, little dears; accidents will happen,' and then we shall be sorry we worried so."

So we began to cheer up, and by and by we put on our bathing-dresses, and, as the water was warm that day, we stayed in a long time and played we were sirens. After that we went fishing, intending, if we were lucky enough to catch any fish, to cook them on the rocks. But we did n't catch any fish, and it was after we had put up our fishing lines in despair that I suggested a bonfire.



"WE STAYED IN A LONG TIME AND PLAYED WE WERE SIRENS."
—*Page 98.*

"I think it will be great fun," said Mamie. "We can build it on that flat rock, and pretty soon the tide will come in and wash all the cinders and things away."

But that was n't what I meant at all. The idea of having a bonfire in the daytime!

"It will be much more fun after it 's dark. Did n't your aunt say they would be gone till nine o'clock?"

Mamie nodded. "Yes she did, but, oh, Mary Jane, how horrid it would be if she should come back and see it."

"Well," said I, "I don't know what harm it could possibly do, or why she would care; besides, we will have it on the other side of the cliff," said I, "and then it could n't be seen from the house at all."

"Suppose it sets fire to something," suggested Dot.

"The rocks won't burn," answered Mamie, scornfully, "nor the sea, nor the sand. Come, we must get it all ready this afternoon."

There was plenty of driftwood scattered along the beach, and we soon made the biggest bonfire that I ever saw.

After tea we went out and sat on the rocks, and

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waited for it to grow dark. I did n't feel very comfortable, but pretended I was having a real good time, and I think Mamie was only pretending, too, for she kept saying, "I am sure Aunt Matilda won't care," and, "I am not disobeying her, for she never forbade my having a bonfire."

It had grown by this time quite dark, so that Mamie said it was time for the fun to begin.

We had brought some pine needles from the grove and had only to drop a lighted match on them, and the whole pile blazed up splendidly. I thought it was the loveliest thing I had ever seen; but it lit up the entire beach, and we had to knock off some of the top sticks for fear it would attract people from the other side of the cliff.

"Pooh! I don't care if Mrs. Benner does see it," said I, for I was n't nearly so low in my spirits after the fun began. "It 's so pretty she would like it, I know."

"So do I," cried Mamie, and of course Dot echoed, "So do I." And as I danced around the fire I went on, —

"If she should come along now, I would say: 'And how do you do, Mrs. Benner? I hope you are enjoying the bonfire,' I would."

"And we hope it 's agreeable to you, Mrs.

Benner," shouted Mamie, flinging on another stick.

Just then Dot grabbed my arm, and Mamie dropped the stick she was going to throw on the pile, and faltered out in the meekest little voice, —

"We are only having a bonfire, Aunt Matilda; I hope you don't care," and then everybody shouted as we saw we had mistaken Mamie's cape, which was flapping round a high rock, for Mrs. Benner.

But we felt rather nervous after that, and Dot, whom we sent to find out if the lamps were lit in the house, said that the folks had come back from Hillvery, and that she thought Pauline — Mrs. Benner's maid — was calling us.

There was still some fire left, and it was fun to stone it and see the sparks fly; but it would take a great while to put it all out in that way. And so we brought water in an old leaky dipper we found, and flung on it, and as we scrambled off we felt sure that we had done no harm in having our bonfire.

When we got home we went right to bed, but for a long time neither Mamie nor I could get to sleep. It was a warm night, and the mosquitoes were thick, and still more disturbing was the recollection of the accidents of the day for which, as we lay there in the dark, we seemed to ourselves much more to blame. There is no rest, you see, for a person who has such a tender conscience as I have. However, at last I did fall asleep and was dreaming that I went to Tuckertown and found that Aunt Jane and Aunt Prue had turned into sirens, when I was suddenly roused by the sound of people running up and down the house.

I sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes, wondering why the room was so light, when it suddenly flashed upon me that there must be a fire outside. I flew to the window and found that the pine grove was in flames. A horrid thought came over me; but no, there was not a spark to be seen when we left the bonfire.

I made a dash at Mamie and told her what had happened.

"Aunt Matilda's pine grove!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my, what will she say? Well, our little bonfire could n't have done it. A spark *could n't* have blown over there, could it, Mary Jane?"

I had never once thought of that. I said that I did n't believe it could, but I felt very uncomfortable. I told Mamie that I had heard her aunt say that she would n't take five thousand dollars for those trees.

"She had better have taken it if she ever had the chance," replied Mamie, "because now the fire is going to get them for nothing. But it is n't our fault, is it?"

By and by mother came into our room. She told us the men were trying to put the fire out; but there was not much hope of saving the trees unless the wind should change and blow the flames back towards the sea.

After she went out, Mrs. Benner came in and sat down by the window, and I knew the hour of reckoning had come.

"Children," she began, "did any fishermen have a fire on the rocks yesterday?"

"No," answered Mamie, and with those piercing eyes of Mrs. Benner upon her, I don't wonder she could n't go on.

Instead, she screwed up her courage, and confessed about the ink we had spilled in the library.

"Well, well," answered Mrs. Benner (if you will believe it, in Dot's very words), "accidents will happen, I suppose. I would rather everything in the house should be spoiled than lose those trees."

It seemed harder than ever after that to own having built the bonfire; but I squeezed Mamie's hand under the bedclothes, and she gave mine such an encouraging squeeze in return that I blurted out the whole truth.

There was a dreadful pause when I stopped, till Dot, who had come in with mother, began to cry, and Mrs. Benner said, in, oh, *such* a disagreeable voice, —

" Then, Mary Jane, I have you to thank for the loss of my trees. I must say, you are the most mischievous girl I ever had in my house; for I don't need to be told who proposed it. Mamie, I shall send *you* home to-morrow; " and she marched out of the room leaving us all crying on the bed.

The grove was not entirely burned after all, but so many trees were scorched that I could not bear to go into it the rest of the time I stayed at Breezy Cove.

For the matter of that, Dot and I were not allowed to stir out of sight, and mother often told us how mortified she had been, and that she never should take either of us visiting again. And though I am so sensitive I shrink from a harsh word, I knew I deserved every one of them.

But one thing I know, and that is, I will never, no never, even if she goes down on her knees to me, pay a second visit to Mrs. Melancthon Benner.

CHAPTER X

MY COME OUT PARTY

IT was almost time for my birthday, and mother said I might have a party. I was filled with delight at the idea, for I never had one before. I don't mean a birthday, of course, for I had already had fifteen of *them,* and this was to be the sixteenth. Yes, I was to be sweet sixteen. But though mother said it was a birthday party, I told everybody that it was to be my come out party.

"Why," said Mamie Whyte, "you won't graduate for three years, Mary Jane. Do you mean to say that your mother is going to let you come out into society *now?*"

"Well, no, I don't suppose she will," I admitted.

"Then you can't have a *come out* party."

"Can't I come out and go in again, I should like to know?" said I.

But Mamie laughed that idea to scorn. "Why, it would be the *queerest* thing I ever heard of. Nobody does," said she, and she seemed to think that ought to settle it.

Now I believe a person at my age should decide such questions for herself. You see a good deal of time had gone by since the days I had played those childish pranks I have been telling about in the former chapters, and I don't make the foolish blunders I did then.

Mamie Whyte is not my bosom friend any more, for Mabel Conway has taken her place. Mabel and I have been devoted to each other ever since the day she first came to our school.

The Conways have been living abroad for some years — ever so many years — as many as two years, I am sure, and they don't like America or Americans very much. At first I used to be vexed with Mabel about this.

" I should think you would be ashamed to talk in such a disparaging way about your own country and your own country-people," said I, one day. " It is n't patriotic at all."

" Mercy, I don't care to be patriotic," she replied. " Nobody is, after they have been abroad. And as for talking so about Americans, if you could see what a figure they cut over there, you would n't wonder. Everybody laughs at them."

" Well, then," said I, " I think people had better stay at home. Anyhow it was real sensible in you to turn round and come back when you found out what a laughing-stock you were."

Mabel never said one word, but judging by her looks I should say she was boiling.

The next day she came to me and said, —

"I am ever so sorry if I offended you by saying what I did about Americans; but I really did n't think you would mind, you are so unlike them yourself."

"Am I," said I, rather shortly. "How?"

"Well, they are so — now don't be offended, Mary Jane — so forward in their manners. The young girls especially, and you are so — so — "

"Retiring," I suggested.

"Yes, that 's just it. So retiring. You must own that most of the girls are ill-bred and awfully slangy, and you, dear, you are — "

"Real particular," said I, as she hesitated again.

"Yes, particular and very refined."

I made up my mind I would not report this conversation to mother, for she never had liked Mabel very much. She always provoked me by saying that Mabel was not sincere, and I was very sure that she would laugh at her compliments. Besides, I remembered that when I told her that Mabel had offered to help me form my manners like an English girl's, instead of being pleased, as one might reasonably expect, mother just laughed at the idea.

"Why," said she, "if you had English manners they could not possibly be unaffected, and that is what Mabel professes to admire. The truth is, she is like a great many other people who come home from Europe and find fault with American manners, but fail to show us what good manners are."

"I think Mabel's manners are lovely," said I, and then the discussion ended.

But to return to the party, for which I had sent out nearly a hundred invitations. I asked ever so many stupid girls just so I could invite their nice brothers; and a good many boys for the sake of their pretty sisters. Then there were all those I did n't dare to leave out, but hoped would n't come, and a few that I wanted, but was afraid I did n't know well enough to invite. Besides these, there were a number of Dot's friends and Lucy's.

Well, at last — at last the day really came. My dress with sash and gloves was laid out upon the bed, and the time was drawing near when I should put them on. In the mean time I was lounging about the parlors in old slippers and a ragged shawl tied over a dressing sacque. Just as I had concluded that it was none too soon to make my toilet, the door bell rang, and as there was not time for me to rush upstairs before the new-comer was admitted, I hid myself in the closet which leads off the back parlor. I had hardly got in, before one of mother's friends was shown into the parlor, and soon mother herself came down. Now, unfortunately, that closet door never will stay latched, and we generally keep it locked. I suppose, as mother sat there talking, she looked around the room to see if everything was in order, for pretty soon she got up and shutting the door behind which I was shrinking, turned the key. At first I thought I would ask to be let out, but concluded that I would wait until Mrs. Brown was gone. I did n't think she would stay very long; but when she left, mother went out with her into the hall and did not come back into the parlor again.

But I never thought of being uneasy. I was perfectly sure that some one would come to my relief.

It was not until the clock on the mantel struck seven that I became alarmed. It was now already time that I was dressed, and though I banged on the door until I was tired, nobody came to let me out.

To make a long story short, when the first arrivals to my party entered the parlor I was still in the closet. I could tell by the voices that beside mother and the twins there were not very many in the room. Should I disclose myself, now, in my bedroom slippers and ragged shawl? It was my only chance, and I waited and lost it. In half an hour the rooms were full.

There is a transom over the closet door, and, as the step-ladder was in the closet, I saw no reason why I should n't at least have the pleasure of *looking on* at the party.

I climbed up and took a peep.

"Well," said I to myself, "it don't seem to be a very brilliant affair."

The horrid girls that I had invited for the sake of their handsome brothers had all come *without the brothers.* Dot and Lucy with their friends had beaten a retreat, and, judging by the sounds, were enjoying some noisy games in the sitting-room overhead. The rest of the company sat round in dull little groups which were occasionally broken up for a sad set of quadrilles or a solemn waltz. They did n't attempt the German, and on the whole I began to be resigned that I was not able to be present at my come out party.

It was a capital opportunity to study my friends, and I made the most of it. I discovered that evening why it was, for instance, that everybody liked that plain Minna Gail, with her quiet way of making people comfortable. And, as I watched my dear Mabel, I wondered if mother had not been right after all, and that she was only affecting to be unaffected.

I had I slight hope that when the time for supper came, and the people left the room, there might be a chance for me to escape from my hiding-place, and I could join the revels after all. But no one that I cared to call upon for assistance came into the parlor. When the rooms began to fill up again I longed to scream out that " I 'd take vanilla," or to ask if the supper had been as solemn an affair as the rest of the entertainment.

While I was wondering if there was anything I could do to make time pass quicker, Mabel and Annie Lane sat down by the closet door, and I heard Mabel quite distinctly as she whispered, —

" Is n't this the queerest party you ever went to? I was sure it would be, and I told mamma that I would n't miss it for the world. I think the Hunts are awfully common, don't you? and I do believe that was Philadelphia ice cream."

“ But the queerest of all is to go to a party where the girl that gives it is left out,” giggled Annie, and Mabel replied, —

“ I never did think much of Mary Jane. She is a perfect American girl, and her manners are awful.”

I don’t remember anything more about my party. I came down the step-ladder then, and sat on the floor until it was over. As the last person left the house, I gave a great bang on the door, and mother with a cry of surprise unlocked it, and as she saw me in my old shawl, and hair still in curl papers, she took in the situation at once, and burst out laughing. As for me, I flung myself into the nearest chair and cried, but it was n’t because I had been obliged to be absent from my own come out party. It was because I was so disappointed in Mabel.

When I had told the whole story to mother, which I did then and there, she placed everything in what I felt to be its true light.

“ I would n’t mind what Mabel said,” she began. “ The ice cream may not have been of the best quality, but it is n’t so ‘ common ’ to have even ‘ Philadelphia ice cream ’ as to accept a person’s hospitality and then laugh at it. As for your manners, dear, we don’t care whether they are

American or English, provided they are good, and no girl's will be that until she learns to think more of others than of herself."

I don't think I shall ever try to give another come out party. I don't believe I have a gift for society after all, and I don't take any interest in such things any more. I am beginning to be perfectly devoted to books, and I am expecting to pass a splendid examination.

The other day some one asked me if I intend to teach after I graduate, and I believe I would if I only could be sure that I never should have any scholars like — er — well like Beth Hall, for instance, who was such a trial to 'Tildy Joy.

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